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ABSTRACT

This book is part of a series of case studies that demonstrate better ways to educate Ohio's students. The case study is part of the Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) Project, designed to support significant school-reform efforts among Ohio's elementary, middle, and high schools. The text describes an elementary school serving a homogeneous student population in a rural section of western Ohio. The school adopted the Accelerated Schools (AS) restructuring philosophy, and the report discusses the principles of AS, the nine underlying values of AS, and the strategies for implementing the program. The book outlines the reflection that went into whether to adopt the AS program, and the experiences with initial resistance, hiring an AS coach, team building, taking stock, and creating a vision for the school. It discusses changes in staff members, in the educational environment, in the students, and in the members of the community. The text provides snapshots of change as it evolved and it offers "mile markers," which describe the process of change, such as "symbolic acts count," "laying the foundation for change is crucial," "change requires leadership," "change is difficult," and "change must be complete." Three appendices provide the project proposal, interview questions, and other information. (Contains 16 references.) (RJM)

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TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Mapping School Change In An Accelerated School

The Case Study of Miami East North Elementary School

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TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

MAPPING SCHOOL CHANGE IN AN ACCELERATED SCHOOL:

THE CASE STUDY OF MIAMI EAST NORTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Prepared by:

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Ohio Department of Education

Columbus, Ohio

1999

Dear Readers:

The 12 Transforming Learning Communities case studies enlighten readers about the search for better ways to educate Ohio's young people. The stories, told by educators themselves, paint a realistic picture of schools in Ohio.

The unique and inspirational perspectives of the school people highlight the triumphs of team spirit, the drive to turn obstacles into opportunities, and the effort to consider complex questions and find answers that lead to higher student achievement. These researchers tell stories of success and frustration in the endeavor to make life better for future generations.

At the core of educational change is a long-term commitment to teaching and learning that has the potential for creating positive change throughout society. The case studies emphasize intense, high-quality professional development; increased service to others; a holistic approach to education; the promotion of a sense of community; and a deepened understanding of the daily work in the classrooms, corridors, and boardrooms of public schools.

The educators at the heart of change encourage us to examine and refresh our views about schools. Sincere thanks is extended to the local educators, university researchers, and concerned citizens for their willingness to examine the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of change.

Sincerely,

Linda C. Nusbaum

Linda C. Nusbaum
Research Project Manager

Transforming Learning Communities Project

INTRODUCTION

The Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) Project was an initiative funded by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to support significant school reform efforts among Ohio's elementary, middle, and high schools. Education researchers associated with the International Centre for Educational Change at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto were contracted to undertake in-depth case studies of school improvement in a select number of schools supported by Ohio's Venture Capital grants. The aim was to understand the school improvement efforts in these schools, and to engage other Ohio educators in the lessons learned from these schools' experiences.

The project title communicates the orientation to the study. "Learning communities" is a metaphor for schools as learning places for everyone (especially students and teachers) who has a stake in the success of schools as educational environments. "Transforming" signifies that the schools are in a process of change, and that the changes they are striving to achieve involve fundamental reforms in teaching and learning, assessment, organization, professional development, and/or governance. Transforming also captures the intent of the project to support — not just to document — the process of change in participating schools.

The TLC Project began in the Spring of 1997. A three-stage process was used to identify and select schools that had demonstrated notable progress in their efforts to implement significant change over the preceding three to five years: (1) solicitation of nominations from ODE staff familiar with the Venture Capital schools, corroborating opinions from independent sources (e.g., Regional Professional Development Center staff), and statistical profiles for nominated schools (e.g., performance and demographic data); (2) telephone interviews with the principal of each nominated school; and (3) ranking of schools according to relevant sampling criteria. Twelve schools were chosen for variation in type (elementary, middle, secondary); location (rural, urban, and suburban from various regions in Ohio); focus for change (e.g., teaching and learning, professional growth, school-community partnerships); school improvement model; and evidence of progress.

The individual case studies were carried out during the 1997/98 school year by teams consisting of at least two members of the school staff and researchers from four Ohio universities that partnered with the schools. Each team designed and implemented a multi-method study of school improvement activities and outcomes in their school learning community. These included interviews, observations, surveys, and documents. While each case study reflected the unique character of school change at each school, the studies employed a common conceptual framework to guide their exploration and analysis of change in these school learning communities. The TLC framework oriented the case study teams to investigate change and change processes in multiple contexts — the classroom, the corridors, and the community — and in relation to three key processes of learning in organizations: collaboration, inquiry, and integration.

The major products of the Transforming Learning Communities Project include 12 individual case study monographs, a cross-case study and handbook, and a companion video at www.ode.ohio.gov.

North Elementary School embodies deep, personal, and institutional commitments to children's lives, to learning, to democracy, and to continually transforming itself to better serve students and the community in its everyday practices. It has achieved foundational changes in the ways it thinks, believes, and acts that change projects and reform initiatives often promise but don't deliver. North Elementary School delivered, and continues to deliver, every day, transforming life and learning in the community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to begin by thanking everyone who helped make this project and document possible. The school community at North Elementary School — the students, staff, faculty, administration, parents, and community members — provided an openness and honesty about their work and community and classrooms and students to a degree that I had never experienced in a field site. I was welcomed into the school; no avenue for inquiry was closed to me. The school district and its administration, especially Superintendent Jeff Lewis and the South Elementary School principal, Rick Hacker, granted me interviews and the pledge to help any way they could. The school study team for the Transforming Learning Communities project — made up of the school's principal, Jim Gay, the school's first Accelerated Schools coach, Kerry Elifritz, and the school secretary, Linda Hofacker — worked continually throughout the project with me and the rest of the faculty and staff, studying the scene with me, opening doors I didn't see, asking questions I never could have anticipated, making clear the most hidden and obvious things. Here at Miami University, I had the good fortune of working with graduate assistant Sarah Maidment, who helped immensely in the final stages of the project. My colleagues at Miami University who participated in the Transforming Learning Communities project by conducting case studies at other area schools — Kathleen Knight-Abowitz and Kate Rousmaniere at Robert Taft High School, and Doug Brooks at Talawanda Middle School — helped immensely throughout by shepherding the grant and by sharing ideas and progress along the way. Also, Dean Julie Underwood offered me the opportunity to study with Miami East North, and I am grateful to her for considering me. Finally, I am grateful to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, especially Steve Anderson, Dennis Thiessen, and Shawn Moore, and the Ohio Department of Education, especially liaison Linda Nusbaum, as well as the many colleagues throughout the Transforming Learning Communities project studying other Ohio Venture Capital Schools, for providing feedback and coaching throughout the study. It is with a sense of gratitude and accomplishment that I, along with the study team from Miami East North Elementary School, Miami East School District, present this study.

Thomas S. Poetter
Oxford, Ohio, 1998

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Chapter One

Imagining the Journey

The Metaphor of Travel The curriculum is a route over which students will travel under the leadership of an experienced guide and companion. Each traveller will be affected differently by the journey since its effect is at least as much a function of the predilections, intelligence, interests, and intent of the traveller as it is of the contours of the route. This variability is not only inevitable, but wondrous and desirable. Therefore, no effort is made to anticipate the exact nature of the effect on the traveller, but a great effort is made to plot the route so that the journey will be as rich, as fascinating, and as memorable as possible. (Kliebard, 1972, pp. 403-404)

The school has an open communication between the parents and the teachers. It welcomes the parents. We get involved as much as we want. If we choose not to get involved, that's our privilege. The teachers, they make you feel like your child is a part their personal family, I think, in some respect. The minute you walk in, it's like you're surrounded by a blanket. - A North parent volunteer

I like coming to school every day, and every teacher — if I'm walking by in the hallway, everybody is always happy to see me and they'll say "hi" and stuff. I'm just really happy to see people. - A fourth-grade student

Miami East North Elementary has put theory into action. I've read a great deal about Accelerated Schools and thought how incredible a school could be if it truly worked toward the same purposes, focused on empowerment with responsibility, and built on the strengths of each student. North Elementary has done that. Together, the teachers and staff have given life to the theories of Accelerated Schools, which have empowered the students to create a community of their own. This is truly remarkable. When I visited the school, I sat in a first-grade classroom and the students sat right next to me. They wanted me to raise my hand

and to ask questions like they did. As I interacted with students in a second-grade class, they directed me to the next activity. "I'm done with my dinosaur drawing. Do you want to see me do my mathematics problems on the computer, Miss Sarah?" Marla asked, and then led me to the computer station for math work. The students were comfortable and giving. The teachers were open about their activities and wanted me to see what they were doing that day. I not only saw the results through student work and reports, but I felt it as a guest in their school. – Sarah Maidment, Project Research Assistant

Considering the Journey

Before I agreed to travel the 90 miles one-way to Miami East North Elementary School in Fletcher, Ohio (from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio), in order to conduct this case study for the Ohio's Department of Education (ODE) under the direction of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), I initially thought to myself, "This is one heck of a long drive." And I knew it would be difficult as a new faculty member at Miami to balance teaching new courses and continuing my research agenda, getting acclimated here with family and new friends, to be running off to Fletcher every week to collect data for the study, and make a contribution to the school community there.

But the community in the school — students, teachers, staff, administrators, and parents — quickly changed my mind and made my decision to work with them a very easy one. They made me feel welcome, like I had something to contribute. They enveloped my life as friends and colleagues. and made me want to come back every single time to learn more. I haven't had a second thought about the long drive until now. The school made every learning step of this journey worth the effort for me.

This, in fact, is what they do for every member of the learning community in vastly different ways, but with a central, humane focus in each case: their great contribution to public education and to their community is that they provide the type of road upon which each individual trip becomes a rich, memorable, and fascinating journey, the kind Kliebard dreams that curriculum can help provide in the opening tag above.

Some Early Mapping

I grew up in a small Ohio town about 45 miles from Fletcher. I know cornfields, family-owned groceries, the values that govern communities, and the considered pace of life that generally exist here. So it felt like I was coming home on my first trip to the school on a hot August day in 1997. The three-story brick edifice emerged quickly from the flat landscape as I approached by car and then on foot. On

entering the building, which used to serve all grades of students in Brown Township, I met the framed class pictures of some of the first graduates of the school. These students looked contemporary, even in their black-and-white poses; no doubt some of them still participate in the life of the school.

Now converted to a kindergarten-through-fourth-grade building, the space offers a certain character typical of schools of its period: high plastered ceilings; real wood interior trim; fresh, glossy, shiny enamel paint on the floors. The basement restrooms, the cafeteria, and the gym all lie beneath the classrooms, down below, but not hidden, and used and used and used. Memories of my own elementary school days spent in a big brick building quite similar to this one came flooding back, nostalgia tugging at me from all directions. But somehow I knew at that moment that I'd find this place to be different from other schools I knew, despite its familiar physical characteristics and setting.

This school, in fact, opened up to me. Teachers welcomed me in and students greeted me from the very beginning, curious at first about what I was doing there, and then insistent on my becoming involved in their powerful, learning-filled classroom endeavors whenever I could. I saw the staff, students, and community working together, collaborating on governance issues and classroom issues as a matter of course, but not as a special treat or as something they had to do. They had truly changed, living out their commitment to becoming an accelerated school. This school had not just taken on the mantle (and money) for school reform in name only. It had truly transformed itself into a school like no other I had seen before.

The school serves a relatively homogeneous student population: students come from nearly 100 percent Caucasian, mostly middle-class families. The community has a low family mobility rate. Only 11 of 221 students are identified with exceptionalities, and only a few of the students could be called seriously at-risk. The economy in the area provides opportunities for families to achieve a largely middle-class life. The school is located in a rural setting and has a very human-scale population of students, teachers, and staff members of around 240. Approximately 220 students and approximately 20 total faculty and staff members populate the school (See Sergiovanni, 1996, and Sizer, 1996, for discussions of the importance of school size and scale). As a small, rural, mostly middle-class elementary school, North doesn't fit the profile that Henry Levin originally envisioned and targeted for schools who would adopt his Accelerated Schools (AS) philosophy and School Restructuring Processes. (An explanation/description of the AS movement follows later in this chapter.)

When he began writing about and actually piloting the AS movement in two San Francisco area elementary schools in the late 1980s, Levin had in mind poor, urban, at-risk, minority students in crumbling, troubled buildings and communities who received unequal and even debilitating schooling experiences (Levin, 1996a). However, the AS movement had grown to include 700 schools by 1995. Most schools were in trouble and needing desperately to claim and reclaim waning values and commitments to students, communities, and education. However there were also schools like North Elementary, where a basic level of community support and traditional family values supporting public education survives and prospers.

What existed at the beginning of this story — when North won the Venture Capital Grant after writing a proposal that included the AS model as the organizing structure of the school — was a focused, unique commitment by the staff and community to implement a philosophical set of ideas and key structural processes to support it. This came at a point when the school could have gone on its merry way without reshaping its very core values and practices. No doubt the wider culture saw the school as successful in its previous state and certainly not part of the problem. By the collective good works of its solid and talented faculty, we might have even called it an excellent school, a place where we might want our own children to attend. While it could have been more open to the community and possibly governed more democratically and been more challenging/exciting for students, the teachers, students, staff, and parents generally thought of the school as a good place to be. So why become an accelerated school? This case report illuminates answers to this question throughout its telling, challenging the reader to see the depth of change in the staff, the program, and the school as a result of its movement toward acceleration.

The Purpose of This Case Study

And so this case study describes and interprets how the school got where it is, to the point that it can nurture and educate a relative outsider like myself and make me a contributing part of its community of learners. As a research team working on this project together — both as a whole school community and in the formal research team made up of myself and three staff members at the school — we have conceived of this project as an opportunity to tell the story of the school, to address the phenomena of personal and institutional change along the way, and to offer insights and suggestions for others interested in taking on a school reform initiative that is comprehensive and designed to transform the entire learning community into an entirely new entity.

I (Tom) am the primary author of the case study. However, the data informing the writing come primarily from members of the school community. In two particular sections, team members contribute essays as significant portions of the case. Jim Gay, the school principal, wrote an account of the school's background and an overview of how the school became an Accelerated School, which follows here. Kerry Elifritz's account of her role as accelerated school coach and reading recovery teacher during the life of the Venture Capital Grant appears in Chapter four.

School Background: Life at North Before the Venture Capital Grant

by Jim Gay, Principal

North Elementary is a small, rural school located in the village of Fletcher. The school, part of Miami East Local Schools, was built in 1919 and has been a focal point of the community from the beginning. The school has always been tightly coupled with the community; this tight coupling occurred as a result of the nature of the community rather than the result of specific efforts by the school. In fact, parents had been held at arms length before the grant. It's not that the staff didn't like parents. The tone of the building held that the parents' role should involve supporting the school without questioning any of the school's activities, policies, or procedures. Despite the guarded way in which the school dealt with parents, parents and community members have always felt education to be important and have always had a high regard for those who worked at the building. The staff has long been dedicated and student-focused.

One of the differences in the "before and after" picture was of how the school was governed. Before the grant, most teachers participated very little in the setting of goals. The principal set goals without input from the staff. Some teachers were able to garner the support of the principal for a particular project, but this possibility was not a widespread occurrence.

Interviews with staff indicate that a different school culture existed before the grant. Before the grant, staff felt as though that they lived and worked under intense scrutiny. If the principal perceived that a teacher's classroom practice was not tightly coordinated with the principal's vision of classroom practice, the teacher would be reprimanded. One staff member, commenting on the school culture before the grant said, "You could just sense the tension in the building. People tried to take a low profile, and concentrate on teaching, without drawing attention. Drawing attention could result in additional scrutiny by the principal." In this oppressive environment, teachers did not feel free to try new ideas or practices for fear of criticism. They also did not feel free to bring new ideas to the principal.

How the Grant Came to Be

In July 1992, the school hired me as its new principal. In September, the Ohio Department of Education issued a request for proposals (RFP) to fund major school restructuring grants called Venture Capital Grants. The RFP was disseminated to all superintendents in the state. Dr. St. Pierre, then Miami East superintendent, shared the RFP with the six building administrators and encouraged them to submit a proposal. The two kindergarten-through-fourth-grade building principals and the Intermediate (5-6) building principal originally met to see if the three could submit a grant together. The other two principals decided that the RFP would be too difficult to write as a group, so each decided to pursue the grant individually.

At North, I wrote the grant with input from the staff. North submitted the only proposal among the principals representing the lower grades. The high school assistant principal also submitted a grant proposal to the state. The first step in the process was the selection of a model. The Venture Capital RFP outlined nine potential models for restructuring: Accelerated Schools, Classroom of the Future, Coalition of Essential Schools, Effective Schools, North Central Improvement, Ohio Community Learning Experience, Outcome-Based Education, School Development Program, and Success for All. The state coached the schools to select from the nine models or create a model of their own.

The teachers and I reviewed the models and selected the Accelerated Schools (AS) model, because it was the closest fit in terms of the way North staff felt about teaching and learning. As mentioned earlier, the North staff was (and is) student-centered. Teachers were always willing to make instructional accommodations for students. Other aspects of the model also appealed to staff. The AS model involved staff in the decision-making process. Community involvement was an integral part of the model. Although parents had been held at arms length in the past, many staff wanted to increase the level of parental involvement at North.

In addition, one of the underlying tenets of the AS philosophy calls for equal access for all students to powerful learning activities. Powerful learning activities, often seen in gifted education programs but rarely in any school's general curriculum, stimulate higher-level thinking skills in students engaged in active, collaborative, and challenging activities. Schools so often reserve these activities for the five percent of the student body identified as gifted and talented. According to AS philosophy, all students *can* and *should* benefit from these activities across the board, regardless of past performance or perceived abilities.

We began writing the grant after selecting the model, dividing the grant application into several sections. I surveyed the staff for thoughts on each section, and I synthesized their ideas and responses into each section. The staff proofread the application, offering suggestions for revision. We submitted the completed grant to the Ohio Department of Education at the end of October of 1992. The state funded the grant at the end of the calendar year 1992, one of the first such grants given by the state for major, focused school reform initiatives on the local level.

What Is an "Accelerated School"?

It would be impossible to examine accurately the phenomenon of change or the processes of change in this school without understanding just what an accelerated school should be and what it looks like. Attempting to decontextualize the act of looking at change without the lens of the AS movement

would serve little purpose, for it would distance the discussion from a most important set of considerations. The state of Ohio originally intended the Venture Capital Grants to fund "long-term effort(s) for positive change that encourage experimentation and risk taking" to ensure that "conditions for learning are right" (*Venture Capital in Ohio Schools*, 1995, p. 1). For this school, most of the positive changes that took place during the funding cycle of the Venture Capital Grant (1993-98) are connected to its use of the AS model and the risks it encouraged the faculty to take in order to transform the learning community for the benefit of student, staff, and community learning.

Therefore, the tension of this case lies in holding a balance between (1) focusing on the change process and its attending factors and insights, and (2) focusing on the AS model. Focusing on one would come at some expense of the other. This case study is not about the AS movement, per se. Rather, it's about a school change project in a school that happened to become accelerated. The two factors turn on each other, cyclically, like a good dialectic. The trick is to hold the phenomenon of school change and the AS movement up together, in tension, so the reader can see more clearly than if there were no tension depicted at all.

Here, then, as a transition to a deeper discussion in Chapter two of the changes that occurred at the school during the adoption and early implementation stages of the reform, I attempt to give a brief overview of the history, philosophies, and actions that mark an accelerated school and the Accelerated Schools movement.

Henry Levin's Foundational Ideas for Accelerated Schools

The Accelerated Schools movement emerged from the vision and life's work of Henry Levin. A professor in education and economics at Stanford, Levin had long been interested in the plight of the economically disadvantaged, especially as their disadvantages (including others besides economic ones) translated into a general lack of access to equal opportunities in public education. He sees a big picture that must be refocused by systematic philosophical and structural changes in schools; schools have long resigned at-risk youth, mostly in urban, minority settings to remedial school experiences focused on basic skills and endless repetition of academic drills (Levin, 1996a).

While these compensatory, less demanding educational programs have long been defended as rational and even compassionate attempts to meet students' basic needs in school, according to Levin they have had the exact opposite effects. They are neither rational nor compassionate, but instead reproduce three very negative conditions that impede educational progress for the least advantaged students: (1) students are stigmatized socially, personally, and academically by being placed in remedial programs; (2) students fall farther and farther behind because of the self-fulfilling prophesy that students can't achieve under mainstream conditions (in the AS system this necessitates the setting of deadlines by which students will achieve acceptable levels of academic competence); and (3) the endless, even mindless, plodding march of skill drills kill any intrinsic interests/motivations students might have for learning or for school, therefore dooming students to joyless experiences of low achievement in school (Levin, 1996b, p. 332).

> *The obvious solution seemed to be to do the opposite. If children arrive at school without the skills that schools expect, slowing down their development through remediation will get them farther behind. If all the young are ultimately to enter successfully the academic mainstream, we must accelerate their growth and development, not retard it.* (Levin, 1996a, p. 9)

Thus Levin (1996b) focuses on acceleration and not remediation, so that instead of producing and reproducing these failing conditions, the school restructures itself to offer a different type of curriculum to its students, especially those deemed at-risk:

> *An effective curriculum for so-called at-risk students must not only be faster paced and actively engage the interests of such children to enhance their motivation, but it must include concepts, analysis, problem-solving, and interesting applications, especially those grounded in the child's previous and concurrent experience outside school.* (p. 333)

Levin (1996b) believes that parents and teachers must be provided the conditions to make significant contributions to the decisions and actions associated with shifting a school culture to value and teach at-risk students well. Tapping community resources, nurturing parent involvement, and developing teacher empowerment constitute essential shifts that the AS model fosters. Levin summarizes his overall views as follows:

> *An effective approach to educating at-risk students must be characterized by expectations of high-quality educational activities and bright futures for all children; deadlines by which such children will be academically able in the richest sense; stimulating instructional programs that build on the interests, proclivities, cultures, and experience of students; decision making, implementation, and assessment by the educational staff who will offer the program in conjunction with students and parents; and the use of all available resources including community and social service agencies and businesses. To accomplish this, the school must incorporate a comprehensive set of strategies that mutually reinforce and transform school context, organization, curriculum, and instructional strategies in a unified way rather than relying on independent and piecemeal reforms.* (p. 333)

One particular measure that Levin uses for judging whether the school community has reached an acceptable, quality school program for students is whether the teachers would send their own children to the school. The goal is to create and provide a program that people care about and value to the point that they would make the ultimate investments of time and commitment, insuring high quality and achievement for all students, teachers, parents, and community members who come in contact with the school.

> *The goal is to bring all students into a meaningful educational mainstream, to create for all children the dream school we would want for our own children.* (Levin, 1996a, p. 15)

The AS movement focuses on elementary schools and young children, though some middle schools have adopted the model. This reveals Levin's interest in, and commitment to, elementary schools and his belief that early schooling is the important starting place for reshaping the public system at all levels.

Levin and his associates at Stanford entered the relatively uncharted paths of systemic school reform by working with two pilot elementary schools in the Bay Area of San Francisco in the late 1980s. The movement has grown to include 700 schools in the United States and international contexts, as well as several regional centers that serve the immediate needs of area member schools. From the beginning, Levin's program carried three principles that schools must adopt and translate into action in order to be considered accelerated: (1) unity of purpose; (2) empowerment with responsibility; and (3) building on strengths (Levin, 1996a, p. 16). Over the course of the past decade, after many start-up experiences, the movement has matured to include nine core values and several crucial strategies for implementation that build on the three principles.

The Three Principles of Accelerated Schools

Unity of Purpose

In order to avoid the trap of simply employing varied, disconnected reform approaches that do not serve the purpose of transforming the learning community comprehensively to serve everyone better, the school commits itself to developing a shared vision of its purposes and practices. Instead of supporting typical school practices of sorting students by perceived abilities, narrowing staff functions to certain roles, and relegating parents to the fringes, accelerated schools "forge a unity of purpose around the education of all students and all members of the school community, a living vision and culture of working together on the behalf of all of the children" (Levin, 1996a, pp. 15-16).

Empowerment with Responsibility

Most schools exclude the primary stakeholders — including students, staff, and parents — from any meaningful input or decision making regarding the governance, curriculum, and/or instructional strategies at the school site. Accelerated schools include all of these primary stakeholders as contributing members who control the destiny of the school and its program in terms of daily decision making and operations (Levin, 1996a, p. 16).

> *In its daily operations, the school community hones its unity of purpose through making and implementing the decisions that determine its destiny. At the same time, the school takes responsibility for the consequences of its decisions through continuous assessment and accountability, holding as its ultimate purpose its vision of what the school will become. This*

result is accomplished through parsimonious, but highly effective, system of governance and problem solving that ensures participation of students, staff, and parents in the daily life of the school. (Levin, 1996a, p. 116)

Building on Strengths

An accelerated school believes that the educational act begins with an appreciation of a student's strengths, and it builds the program of teaching, learning, and study on these grounds. So many schools focus on weakness and deficiency, thereby missing the great talents and abilities that all children have.

> *Accelerated schools begin by identifying strengths of participants and building on those strengths to overcome areas of weakness. In this respect, all students are treated as gifted and talented students, because the gifts and talents of each child are sought out and recognized. . . . Accelerated schools evoke the participation of all children in the activities of the school, validating the children's strengths and addressing their areas of special need. . . . This is accomplished by employing classroom and school-wide curricular approaches based on inclusion of every child in the central life of the school.* (Levin, 1996a, p. 17)

The process does not end with the noble goal of including all children. In an accelerated school, the strengths and contributions of all teachers and parents, community members and staff are factored in to the possibility of success. Together they build a collective strength for achieving academic excellence and for dealing with issues and problems as they arise.

Nine Underlying Values

The nine values that pervade the relationships and activities of the school are the school as a center of (1) expertise, (2) equity, (3) community, (4) risk taking, (5) experimentation, (6) reflection, (7) participation, (8) trust, and (9) communication (Levin, 1996a, pp. 17-18). Several of these values, and the school's adherence to them, play a major role in supporting the core principles in the school and for shaping the change that occurred in the school.

Powerful Learning

Out of a commitment to the three principles and the nine values emerge what Levin (1996a) calls *powerful learning* situations:

> *A powerful learning situation is one that incorporates changes in school organization, climate, curriculum, and instructional strategies to build on the strengths of students, staff, and community to create optimal learning results. . . . Powerful learning builds on the strengths of all*

> *community members and empowers them to be proactive learners by developing skills through intrinsically challenging activities that require both group work and individual endeavor.* (p. 18)

Part of this case tells the story of the school's quest for its own clear definition of powerful learning, and a commitment to it in all that it does for learners and the community.

Strategies for Implementation

Several key strategies and stages mark the change process for transforming the philosophy and structure of an accelerated school. First, an accelerated school coach is trained for guiding the implementation of the model on the school site. Second, once the school chooses and places this person, it begins the process of *taking stock*, which involves the delineation of the "resources, activities, teaching and learning processes, students, community and other dimensions" in the school (Hopfenberg et al., 1993, cited in Levin, 1996a, p. 19). Third, it establishes its basic mode of posing situations, hypotheses, problems, and solutions to research through constructivist, inquiry-oriented activities. This process of conducting inquiry becomes the core of the school's operating procedures, both in terms of governance and in terms of classrooms activities (Levin, 1996a). Fourth, all members of the community — parents, community members, teachers, staff, students, and the school as a whole — and participate in this inquiry and taking-stock process through teams, or cadres, designed to carry on the inquiry process. These cadres, representing varying concerns for the school program and its governance, meet as committees regularly and pose problems, choose among alternative solutions, and take action. Fifth, springing from the baseline data gathered about the school, the cadres produce a vision for the future that the entire school will dedicate itself to. Sixth, after comparing this vision with the baseline data, the cadres identify challenges that will become focal points for further inquiry and solution generation (Levin, 1996a). Seventh, a steering committee and the school as a whole examine potential solutions and enable the cadres to implement effective solutions. All the while, the principal works with the AS coach to shepherd the process by providing access to information; by encouraging the community to take risks to better the educational program for students; by arbitrating disagreements; by creating a trusting atmosphere for generating great, new ideas; and by guaranteeing voice for all parties involved on all issues.

This democratic process and the structures are much more flexible and less linear than depicted here (Levin, 1996a). This dynamic, fluid process plays out in the story of North Elementary. It is not always as clean as depicted, but no less dynamic.

Chapter two expands these preliminary definitions of the AS movement's parts by providing more details of the adoption process for the model at North, especially as the process reflects the fundamental ideas of Accelerated Schools and the story of change in the school. Also, Chapter two extends the discussion of the implementation of the model in the school, how it came to be, what it looked like, and how it has been evolving and maturing during the life of the grant.

Chapter Two

Changing Directions: Laying Out the Road Through the Adoption and Implementation Phases

Looking Back Again Through the Rear-View Mirror

It's fair to say that any school changes substantially over the course of five years. People come and go; that makes for change. Students, communities, and cultures all change, whether we want them to or not. Some would say that the factors that cause the changes not only are identifiable but are even quantifiable. I'm not so sure about that, particularly for large-scale endeavors, and even for small-scale endeavors like this one. This small-scale study itself would tempt reason by positing a causal connection between any *x* factor and *y* result. Human action and institutional movement are much too complicated for that.

But the sort of cultural inertia that we live with over time, in which people and institutions change while they are preserving the same standard positions and operating procedures, is entirely different from what happens when people work with new processes to shift a whole school culture, including its philosophies, values, and actions. This study attempts to describe and interpret the latter, and to show some of the relationships between ideas, actions taken, and change.

At North, after five years of working with the grant and the change processes that can occur by adopting the AS model, research team members and the community still struggled with an early question: "Are the changes we see in the school and in ourselves attributable to the AS model mainly, or would they have happened anyway given certain factors in place, like hiring Jim [Gay, the principal] and experiencing his progressive and excellent leadership, or because the school seemed to be moving in these new directions on its own?"

Well, it's fair to say that Jim is an excellent and powerful leader, mostly because of his ability to empower others to do their best work in a caring, democratic environment. But Jim cringes at the thought of considering himself as the primary factor for this successful change story, and he's right to cringe. While his leadership made much of the change chronicled here possible, we can't say that either he or even the predisposition of the faculty for being student-centered and progressive was the primary reason for the changes at the school.

What happened at North is bigger than any one person, or any one idea, or even one set of ideas. Instead, what happened is a complex, interwoven story of many different factors causing many different changes. The comprehensive shifts at the school emerge from the early stories of adopting the AS model and then implementing it in the school. This chapter attempts to recreate the road map that the school created for itself in its early stages. We might find important clues here for understanding what and how change occurred in this school.

Adopting the Model

For clarity's sake, I include in the adoption phase the early activity of choosing the model and writing the grant as well as the first year's activities of choosing a coach, training members, taking stock, establishing cadres, creating a steering committee, and deciding on the school's vision, among other activities. The implementation phase begins after the Vision Celebration at the end of the first year of funding. This is the point at which the school began to implement the full AS model in the school and community (actually the beginning of the school year 1994-95). There is, of course, some overlap: fluidity is a hallmark quality of the AS movement.

When you truly adopt something, you reshape existing conditions to meet the conditions of a new order. I think of adopting a child, for instance. I've never adopted, but I do have two young boys. Nothing is the same after a child enters the home. Everything gets tossed on its ear — relationships, patterns of behavior, even beliefs and values — and patterns of thought and action shift to accommodate the new order at hand. In this case, the adoption of the model changed the conditions at hand, and the school community jumped into the model with more than a surface-level commitment and a willingness to do simply what is necessary in order to get the grant money. McCutcheon (1995) calls this "satisficing" in curriculum deliberation settings, that is, meeting the bare minimum expectations just to get the job done. A wholehearted commitment to shifting things that really work in school marks the difference between money spent well in school reform movements and money misspent and misapplied.

The Accelerated Schools Model *Fits*

The school community members talk of the AS model fitting the school and its general direction. Thus the model serves the initial purposes of both validating their past work and prompting a rethinking of just how they could better serve students and fulfill their mission in the very near future. While the school has few truly at-risk students in the senses that Levin conceives of them, the community recognizes the need for school to challenge and interest the broad array of learners who come through the doors each day.

Regardless of what the students bring to school, the teachers have long been committed to tapping students' connections with the community, their interests, their individual talents.

> *The model was selected because it seemed to be in line with the philosophies of the people that worked here at the time, and it's mostly the same people that are still here. But the philosophies that "all children are gifted," "all children can succeed," "having high expectations for everyone," and "we're not going to teach down to kids" were all things that people believed in. When the AS model talks about powerful learning and hands-on activities, our school members were already implementing hands-on mathematics and themes, doing things that they thought were powerful. So they thought this was a perfect model through which to just blossom and build on what we were already doing.* – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

So the model fits this general disposition of the faculty to care for students first, and then to use that base of relationship and personal knowledge to build effective curriculum and pedagogy, adjusting for students as needed. The staff easily agreed with the AS position on inclusion, believing that all students should be included in the richest possible school experiences all of the time. The school's commitment to inclusion represents one of the school's greatest achievements; I chronicle changes and advances in this area later in the study.

The timing for writing the grant proposal and receiving the funding fit closely with Jim's new presence as principal. The story of Jim's beginning work as principal at the school coincides with the story of winning the grant and adopting/implementing the model. His and the other school members' leadership made it possible for everyone to have input, establishing that the shift toward a more democratic atmosphere and method for decision-making consisted of more than just rhetoric.

> *We've always been a close-knit staff, and we decided that we needed to do something to help make the school a better place for kids. Mr. Gay came to the school, and he had some experience in writing grants. We just started looking at some different models that we thought sounded interesting. We shared our input about what we wanted and what we were looking for, how we wanted to make change, what we saw the school's needs to be. Then we narrowed it down to two or three models, and then to one. We all had the opportunity to*

> *read over the models, discuss them, and come to a consensus as to whether or not we wanted to adopt the AS model. That was the one we picked. I believe just about everyone on the staff signed off, saying they felt comfortable with that one — they wanted to do it. When I say staff, that includes custodial, kitchen, bus drivers — everybody. Everybody was included in the decision.* – Rhea Kirk, first-grade teacher

From the very beginning, the school employed the very core processes of democratic governance and shared decision making based on inquiry espoused by the AS model.

> *There was always a dedicated staff here that cared about kids. The building chemistry seemed to be different. Parents have told me that they would come in and they didn't really feel welcome, but they do now. You wouldn't see as many staff getting together and talking about how they can help kids, or just enjoying each other's company, as you do now. And again, this is just my perception of what I've heard. Since the adoption of the model, I think the building has kind of opened up to parents, and staff have opened up to each other;... in those respects, it's a much more productive place.* – Jim Gay, principal

There is no doubt that the school was ready for the changes that the grant and the AS model would bring. But it is also certain that the school community could never have anticipated the magnitude and pervasiveness with which the model would change the way it thought about school and acted there. The model stretched the community's conceptions of time, commitment, roles, teaching, curriculum making, and learning.

Early Storms

One of the things I learned as a kid growing up in this area had to do with appreciating storms. While storms could wreak havoc (and a rough thunderstorm must be respected, for our area was no stranger to killer tornadoes and spring flooding), storms primarily gave and replenished life. Also, there may be few things more beautiful than the still, calm, rainy smell just before and after a Miami Valley soaker. Storms are nature's way of delivering the good stuff that keeps us going — alive — while providing an aesthetic edge to our human existence, even in the midst of potential wrath.

And so it was that I perceived the early days of adoption of the AS model at North as a storm brewing. I mostly gathered these impressions when I talked with folks about the early moments of the change process. They would become nervous — even excited — when they thought back on the beginnings. I attribute this general reaction to the ways in which the AS model requires school community members to challenge themselves to rethink and reshape their basic commitments. They sensed, I think, the excitement of enormous potential in their future actions: that they could renew and give life to the so-very-familiar work of educating the young. Connecting back to these basic ideas, retelling the story,

energized them; it made them think of how the pace and focus of their work has changed, and how the intensity of being accelerated has reshaped who they are. (The case study examines these movements in the school community with detail in Chapters four and five.)

After winning the grant and agreeing to adopt and implement the model, the school finished the academic year that had begun with only the dream of becoming accelerated. And while the school could have become accelerated without winning the Venture Capital grant (Levin purposely conceives of his model for reform without any sort of monetary requirement on the school's part; in fact, he designed the program for those with no money), the money to support the grant (25 thousand dollars per year for five years) lent credibility and urgency to the endeavor. The dream would soon become a reality, however, as the summer before the first year of funding approached. These next sections of the chapter mainly rely on the reflective insights of the two original AS coaches at the school — Jim and Kerry — as they reflect on the events that occurred during the adoption and early implementation phases of the model.

Hiring an AS Coach

In choosing a person to serve as the school's first AS coach, the school took one of the first steps in the adoption stage that could make possible the transition to implementation stage. The AS coach helps guide the Accelerated Schools process by assisting in the conceptualization and implementation of new governance processes, pedagogies, and curricula and devotes at least half-time to assisting teachers and the process. Hiring the new coach proved to be no easy task, one which caused some stormy controversy.

> *With Accelerated Schools, a coach is selected. It's a paid position, where the person is a coach working half-time with the staff and teaches in the classroom half-time, or it could be a person from the outside who is paid to come in and work with the staff half-time. The superintendent at the time... and I wanted an inside person, because we initially thought that would be better than having an outsider come in and tell us what to do. Several people from the building applied for the position, and Kerry was selected. Because of the way we structured the posting for the position, I had to send one person to a coaches' training session before the posting closed. And I sent Kerry, and she ended up getting the job. Two teachers filed a grievance, contending that the process violated the master contract. Some hard feelings ensued. So I think that was a rough start.* – Jim Gay, principal

Jim was the only person to mention to me this situation regarding the hiring of a coach. Most have put it behind them. People involved may see it as irrelevant now after five years. Some don't even know or care that things started like this, but it points to how tremendously human any change endeavor is. The humanity of a movement gives it strength, of course. However, because we make mistakes, *and* peo-

ple get their feelings hurt, *and* things don't always go as planned, *and* timing sometimes just isn't right, *and* we all have our own idiosyncratic intentions/plans/likes/dislikes, even our best laid plans often go awry.

Things that happen like this can have an impact on the structural changes at stake in a scene, because the personal domain of experience matters. The key players in this storm all survived and work together productively now, but this event had ramifications for Kerry's work as a coach and for the school's work, especially in its beginning stages.

Kerry commented on the process.

> *The job was made open for an accelerated schools coach. Someone was going to be trained and would come back and train our school. So I applied for that position and got it. Then in June of that year (1993), I went to a training session with the national AS folks in Virginia Beach. We spent ten days (Jim went as well) learning the AS process and learning how to train our school in the process.* – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

Because of this early experience in the hiring process, and other reasons that Kerry and I will discuss in Chapter four, Kerry began very early in the process to define her role as coach in the area of structural and programmatic reform. She and Jim agreed that she would focus her work on the adoption and implementation phases of the model's structural components on a day-to-day basis, while Jim would focus his work on translating the model into classroom practices and strategic, long-term planning.

> *We've had this discussion from the very beginning as co-coaches. I set this boundary for myself: Since I was a beginning teacher plus the school coach, I kind of limited myself to the implementation of the AS process and did not present myself as someone who intervened in the classroom. I just didn't see that as my job. That left that part of it with Jim. I could do the implementation part, and Jim would make the connections with the classroom.* – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

Adequate, usually excellent coaching is crucial for the beginning phases of adoption and implementation in the AS process. Kerry's responsibilities focused mainly on these beginning steps. Kerry and Jim held the knowledge that others needed to start working with the model; the pressure to provide adequate training and answers to tough questions tugged at Kerry, especially. But she held her own, and she shepherded the staff and community though the early phases of adoption, which were intense and came up fast for the school community.

Team Building

In terms of professional development and preparation for becoming an AS, one of the most important steps that the school took came late in the summer before the first year of funding (1993-94), dur-

ing the school's first faculty retreat. In a setting off the school campus — which became a professional-development custom and necessity for this staff — the school faculty and staff began the process of preparing itself for change. Every member of the school staff participated in the retreat and is encouraged to attend every professional-development opportunity the school offers. This is an essential aspect of the AS model: Every member of the school community has something important to offer that contributes to the overall mission of the school and thus should be involved in every aspect of school life. Kerry and Jim described the team-building event in the following exchange (cross-case interview).

> Jim: *Kerry and I had just been to Virginia Beach for coaches' training, and we had been back a week. There hadn't been time to do anything yet. But when we were finally planning how to get this AS thing started, we thought we would start off with a summer retreat, focusing on how we interact with each other.*
>
> Kerry: *This team-building event came at the very beginning, before we even talked about Accelerated Schools as a staff. Team building was probably the strongest foundation we could've built on to start the whole process. People felt like they knew each other better than ever as a result. And they had worked together for 15, 20 years. It just kind of laid the foundations for us to actually be able to collaborate together, to understand each other, and find out that even though we may have differences about how things are to be done, we really are all working towards the same things.*
>
> Jim: *What I think that session did, with a very well-known and capable team builder from Iowa, was help us realize that we can disagree on issues, but that doesn't become personal. And you're right: People had worked together 20 years, some of them, and really didn't know each other or didn't trust each other. And I think the team building helped set the stage for the collaboration that happened later on.*

One of the most common mistakes that groups engaged in a change project make is ignoring the substantive foundation-building processes of developing personal understanding, trust, and general comfort that need to take place at the very beginning and continue through the life of the project (Fullan, 1991; McCutcheon, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1996). Change on a broader scale has very little chance of happening or sticking if the people involved don't like and know each other well. Any change that does occur will most likely reflect inhumane, mechanical, and routine processes that remain relatively disconnected from colleagues, community, and students. This phenomenon often occurs when the organization and its members pay little or no attention to the personal concerns of trust, communication, and care. The North staff anticipated this possibility and the potential strength to be gained from this aspect of team-building and a continual attention to it; the benefits lie in the web of relationships and commitments that continue to support the model and professional actions for education on the scene. They continue today.

Jim and Kerry presented initial training sessions concerning the AS model at this first summer retreat. They continued to provide information and coaching throughout the first stages of the process, mostly in less formal ways as their work became embedded in their colleagues' work through planning for early events and through participating in cadre meetings during the taking-stock and visioning processes.

Taking Stock

I asked Kerry early in the research process, "What does the formal model of Accelerated Schools look like? Is there structure to it?" She said:

> *You know, as far as the structure goes, all that is there is a road map showing you how to go through the taking-stock and vision processes. There are certain steps to take, but you basically have the AS philosophy, and the school decides how and when to take the steps. The rest is up to us.*
>
> *There's a process that AS lines out... It involves finding out where you are through the taking-stock process, setting your vision,... taking that information from the taking-stock process, prioritizing it in committees, and starting to work on those ideas in cadres. We just followed that process and started seeing some results.* – Jim Gay, principal

A unique aspect of this change model for schools is that while the AS model provides several important core principles, ideas, and processes for the education communities, the rest is really up to them to gather data, interpret it, make decisions together, and move. In a sense, no one is telling them what to do, though there are some markers to move by. This allows a tremendous amount of freedom for a community, which is just what communities need to build their own strong programs by tapping their own strengths and core values.

> *The first step in the process is to train the staff and the community on what AS is. And the next step is to take stock, which is developing surveys of questions that you want to ask everybody involved in the process, and find out what kind of concerns they have. What do they think our challenges are? What do they think our strengths are? We tried to get a real clear picture of where we were, because you can't go forward until you really know where you are. That took most of the fall of 1993 to put all of those surveys together [and get them] sent out, back, and tabulated. By the end of the fall, we pretty much had that finished. In the meantime we started developing a vision statement. To do that, we had to canvas the community, asking staff, students, community members the question, "What is your vision of what an AS should be?" We got everybody's ideas,... sat around in groups,... went through all of this information and tried to find common threads. What are things that everybody expects from a school? What is best for kids? After we got those common threads, then we*

put together our vision statements. We had groups that worked to refine it and make sure that our whole school could support it. – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

So the taking-stock process took place during the first year, in which the school community asked questions, gathered data, discussed what they wanted for their children and school, and decided what they believed in. This all represents a certain stock that the school taps to build on for future use. I think one of *Webster's* many definitions for the word *stock* works well to describe what the community gathers when it takes part in this process: a quantity of something accumulated for future use. In this sense, then, the school goes through the taking-stock process in order to gather understanding of what its strengths (and weaknesses) are so that it can build upon them. Going through the process of taking stock represents a commitment to all three of the core principles of the AS undertaking: recognizing a unity of purpose, empowering each other through responsibility, and building on strengths.

Reaching the point at which the community can recognize, agree on, and write a statement of its unity of purpose — or a vision *statement* — constitutes the major goal of the taking-stock process during the first year of adopting and implementing the model. Therefore, the map that the AS model provides, allows for a skillfully and thoughtfully laid path to be developed and extended by the school itself. The process enables the school to make its own way. Instead of hastily making its way or just doing, or believing what someone else says, a school community takes its time getting its bearings straight, while at the same time experimenting with the very processes and structures that will become its new normative modes. This builds empowerment through the creation of new responsibilities and commitments to the process and to each other. And finally, the process honors strengths, building on the community's commitment to this value and actually revealing specific strengths the community has in stock.

As the school progressed through the taking-stock process that first year, it sponsored meetings of the entire school as a whole. The meetings included parents and community members in all of the events, conversations, and decision-making processes. These were very successful events, serving not only to increase the range of voices and ideas involved in the process, but literally to open the school up to the community. People came to the school, ate food together, talked, argued, listened. In fact, at the end of the funding cycle and after the fifth year of using the model, one teacher believes the school would do well by sponsoring more large events that encourage community involvement and focus specifically on the reform, the kind that was very successful at the beginning.

When we started, there was a very large meeting for everyone held on a Saturday (August 1993). We explained AS to everyone, and we talked about cadres, and we brainstormed possible different cadres the school might have. There was a tremendous number of parents there. I would like to see us have another big meeting next fall and try to re-explain what is going on for parents. That day we were here most of a Saturday. We had such great participation. – David Martin, third-grade teacher

We had an event where we had parents and staff members in to the school and we talked about what we were going to do. That was very successful. That was in August of the first year. We had a lot of participation, both with parents and staff in the taking-stock process. We had a lot of participation from parents and staff with the first-year vision process where we created our vision. Really, those were key elements. – Jim Gay, principal

We had different activities for the community members and teachers, where they worked in small groups together, and they talked about what it meant to build on each other's strengths, and what does it mean to all be working towards the same goal. We re-wrote the story of the Three Little Pigs as if they were actually accelerated three little pigs — how they build on each other's strengths. So we have some books now that tell those early stories, and I think that people had fun. I think this gave parents a whole new experience: they were seen as an actual part of a decision-making process. This was really a new thing, that their ideas were just as important as the staff members' ideas. And the cooks and bus drivers were involved in building the small groups. Everybody's ideas were important. That session was very important. – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

Creating a Vision for the School

The vision statement created by the school community during the first year appears on nearly every piece of written communication that has come out of the school since then.

North Elementary Vision:

We are a caring community of learners who accept responsibility, value and respect individual and cultural differences, experience success and prepare for the future.

I guess another key element was our Vision Celebration that first year. According to the model, after you have taken stock and you have set priorities, you're supposed to have a Vision Celebration where you celebrate what you're about to do. And we had a big community turn out for that. We had a parade through the town of Fletcher. It included the high school band and the fire department. All the kids marched from the park to the school. The building was wrapped in a ribbon and the community cut the ribbon for its new school. That was a major event. – Jim Gay, principal

It would be foolish to downplay or underestimate the amount of energy this vision celebration carried for the life of the model in this school setting. Symbolic acts that represent change have enormous impact on community members' collective perceptions of who they are and where they are going. Big events that carry symbolic meaning translate themselves over and over again in the stories people tell

and the collective memory they share. Events such as these mark a community groundswell of commitment. They show the power of a unified mind and direction (Sergiovanni, 1996). They signal that there is no turning back, that "this is what we say that we are going to do together" with the backing of the whole town.

> *The other key event was the Vision Celebration Day. That day to me is probably the highlight of the past five years. The whole idea of the parade from the park to the school was that we were coming back to enter a brand-new school, because we had a new vision of where our school was going, and it was a caring place where everybody could succeed and everybody was expected to do their best. And so we were trying to get the idea across that, when we returned, we had a brand-new place.* – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

Transitional Factors in the Implementation of the AS Model

The beginning processes of the AS model introduced the school community, especially the teachers and staff, to a new type of school work, work that reflected the values of the model such as collaboration and integration. Teachers could no longer think of their work in isolation, even if they wanted to. Collaboration became the operative mode in which most of the teachers worked. No longer could a teacher be concerned only with the curriculum for the fourth grade or for a lesson plan for tomorrow, for example.

Now others had a stake in the classroom, including those thought of only very recently as outsiders, especially parents and community members. Suddenly every decision seemed to involve many more complex connections and factors than before. Ideas and decisions blossomed in committees, opinions were shared and heard at the table, and cadre members researched ideas and solutions instead of making snap decisions. As a result of these new processes, school became a much more collaborative, integrated and complex endeavor. This is no easy transition, but rather one with which the school struggled and still struggles. Teachers, especially, depict the struggle with this complexity, the time the new work takes, and the seeming tediousness of the democratic decision-making process. But trading it would mean reverting to a more controlling, hierarchical governmental pattern.

The way the staff thought about and acted on their commitments to time for teaching and school life shifted as the first experiences with the AS model began to reshape the community. They felt stretched, as if everything had changed very quickly. And it had.

> *At the beginning I was kind of thinking, "What am I getting myself into by signing this [the letter of agreement to pursue the AS model that each team member signed]? I guess it's because I didn't really know that much about it, and I think that most of the staff signed it without really knowing what they were getting into.* – Amy Dawson, fourth-grade teacher

Amy wouldn't go back to life in school before the AS model for anything; neither would most of her colleagues or community members. But the new model required attending lots of meetings outside the school day and thinking hard about the big picture of schooling beyond the four walls of the classroom. When this happens, it makes each step more difficult, more considered, extremely labor intensive. It calls into question the relatively cavalier way we go about the business of schooling in most places, but the higher moral ground doesn't make the work any easier. The staff grappled with that fact and still does. It should.

> *These first steps in the AS process were very difficult, because it was new ground that we were covering. We had no idea how to do it. We just had the AS framework, but you have to adjust even that to know how it best works for you. It was very difficult. The Vision Celebration means so much long term, especially when you get to places where there's a natural dip in the implementation of the model, and people are feeling a little low and tired of all the meetings. Maybe another mini-celebration could bring a little lift.* – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

> *My teachers are complaining all the time about not having time, and they're not even on the cadres that Jim's staff members are on. Jim's staff members are doing double what mine are doing. Those cadres meet once or twice a week.* – Rick Hacker, South Elementary School principal

> *The word around with some of the staff is that AS is a lot of work. Jim Gay would say himself, "This staff works hard." They have the cadre meetings all of the time. They have special meetings. But they are seeing and identifying holes in their program, and they make targets to set their sights on. They provide something everyone can buy into and participate in, including the bus drivers and the cooks. I think there were only two people who couldn't attend their fourth summer retreat. But they're still energized. When they get tired, they just tell you.* – Jeff Lewis, superintendent

It's true that the staff has worked to deal effectively with the workload issue and the personal shifts that had to be made in order to adopt and implement the model. Little dissatisfaction remains on the staff in terms of the struggles that attended the early shifts that had to be made. But it is no secret that some resistance to the model and the changes taking place occurred among members of the faculty.

Of Saboteurs

Every movement involves those who aren't completely sold on the idea from the start. So many possibilities exist for this condition to develop. Suffice it to say that change theorists understand that sabotage occurs and that resistance can be a healthy aspect of the change process. Conflict can yield better, deeper, fairer ideas and processes. But the fact that it can also damage is lost on no one who has worked on a school restructuring project. One of the keys to dealing effectively with the tensions that naturally occur when a staff and school change their personalities and ways of going about their work

rests in the hands of those responsible for shepherding the implementation: the coaches. How they go about leading the way makes a tremendous difference (Fullan, 1991).

> *From my perspective, some people have always found fault in some of the things that 90 percent of the group wanted to do and would try to talk other people into not supporting it. This would happen in the lounge and in the hallways. Mostly, any sabotage occurred in the verbal picking at what people wanted to do. And there are two or three people on the staff that would rather just be left alone, who are good at what they do, but would just as soon not have to come to a cadre meeting or a committee meeting. Not everyone wants to come to those things, but they do come, and they come every time, and they don't work against it now. In that respect, things are much better. When you think about all of the time that is put into Accelerated Schools, I understand wanting to be left alone every now and then. In fact, during the tough times when Kerry and I would sense the biggest push against AS, when all of the cadres were working on heavy projects and had been spending a lot of time, we would ease up a little bit and say that the cadres had two weeks off. We gave people a chance to rest. We would also let people know repeatedly that the cadre meetings are scheduled but they didn't have to come.* – Jim Gay, principal

It's safe to say that this relatively small staff has gotten along well, and members have supported each other well. This doesn't mean that they haven't had tough moments, some of which I'll mention in later chapters that examine specific changes in more depth. Moreover, this is not a criticism of the staff and its work, but a recognition of an important factor that has an institutional and human impact on every change process and school reform project in the works today. To ignore it would be foolish, providing little insight into an important area of concern for understanding how schools and people do and can change.

> *I think we had a little bit of negativity in the beginning. When I say a little bit, I mean a small number of people who were negative. I see that diminishing. Change is hard. I mean, I don't like change sometimes. It's an unknown. It's that risk-taking factor.* – Rhea Kirk, first-grade teacher

Shifting the Focus to Professional Development

The school blended several very important professional-development opportunities into the adoption and early implementation phases to assist the school and the community in moving and changing with the AS model. Several of the early efforts have already been mentioned in this chapter — such as the early training in AS background for the two coaches, the school-as-a-whole meetings for the entire school community, and the first summer retreat for team-building and introducing the staff to the model. All of thesse efforts occurred at the beginning of the grant funding cycle and right at the start of the adoption phase of the model. These early, focused, and programmatic attempts at providing professional-development oppor-

tunities for the school community (and especially the staff) to try on new ideas and experiment with them reflected, in action, several of the core values that the AS model supports establishing a center of expertise, equity, community, risk taking, experimentation, reflection, participation, trust, communication. (Levin, 1996a, pp. 17-18).

These early opportunities gave the school community the chance to see the wealth of expertise that its own members have and to draw on those talents. Equity, community, and participation grow and mature when people have the opportunities to share ideas openly in non-threatening and supportive environments, as in the early school-as-a-whole and cadre meetings. The entire movement created a more open environment for risk-taking, experimentation, and reflection.

> *I think the atmosphere in the school is so different now. If you have an idea, you're free to express it. We can take more risks now. And if you do make a mistake, you're not going to be in trouble. People are more relaxed.* – David Martin, third-grade teacher

From early on, communication became a very important issue, especially considering the numerous groups that began meeting. The school perceived the need for everyone to be well-informed about the myriad of new things happening inside and outside the school, so it built new communications systems into its fledgling structures and processes. The school communicates to the public through word of mouth, of course, but also through systematic, periodic publications such as the *Morning Notes* that go out to faculty and staff every day; the *Weekly Newsletter* that is produced by a parent volunteer and communicates the schedules for upcoming events and highlights student writing; the twice-monthly newsletters that each class sends home to parents; periodic postings of important documents such as minutes from the various cadre meetings; and a continual flow of electronic mail to staff members that keeps them updated and informed, among other sources. Plenty of data circulate, communicating the progression of ideas and processes to the school community. The continual attention to communicating itself represents an embedded commitment to professional development through the free, open, consistent sharing of ideas and events.

The structures and processes of the AS model that were employed from the very beginning represent focused, though less formal attempts at professional development in support of the changes taking place. There is a tension between this view of the processes and a view of all of the meetings as just more meetings to go to (sometimes I feel this way about my own work, too. Nevertheless, the actual work done in the school-as-a-whole meetings, staff meetings, and cadres represents an embedded opportunity for professional development, especially if the school buys into the notion of changing the professional culture by increasing the structured opportunities for input and decision-making. Morover, if the meetings, are productive, focused, and helpful, the work by the staff on the model should constitute one of the most powerful opportunities for learning and development among staff.

Tom: *Are the cadre meetings a form of professional development?*

Kerry: *I guess so, if you are learning from each other and you are planning changes for your building — that's all staff development and professional development.*

We often look for airtight answers to questions, hoping that there is some sort of causal link between an action and some result. Taking this path nearly always leads us down a dead-end road. The temptation in a study such as this one would be to try and determine, for instance, which of the professional-development opportunities (or combination of them) had a direct impact, or the most direct impact, on the changes that occurred on the scene. In this case, the most I can say is that they each had an impact, individually and collectively. It is safe to say, however, that providing opportunities for professional development is a crucial step in the process of change. It is hard to imagine a staff not having any guidance at all, even if conducting and shepherding the professional growth by themselves, when trying to interpret and use a complex change model.

Also, it stands to reason, from this example and from what we know about change in schools, that the formal attempts at programming professional development in support of change are not the only attempts that take place and are important. They may, in fact, constitute a less important set of endeavors than less formal, continual, though intense professional-development opportunities. Professional development is found in opportunities to work in teams, cadres, and all-school committees over time.

In fact, I'm willing to say here that the hope for change in school cultures exists primarily through offering staff, parents, community members, and students opportunities to participate in the life of the mind through the free sharing of ideas that governs the general happenings of the school, not just those that go on in the classroom. We hope for the type of democratic, open, free exchange of ideas and decision-making opportunities that North Elementary School experienced to permeate schools and transform them to mirror the good and the right in our society as a whole, as well as to liberate us to teach to the best of our ability. These opportunities for growth ought then to be found primarily in the work that we do and not necessarily imported, though these events also serve an important purpose, as discussed above.

Chapter three examines the changes that occurred in the school and community as a result of the adoption and implementation of the AS model. There I chronicle the changes perceived in this learning community among the staff, students, and community stakeholders.

Chapter Three

Twists and Turns Along the Road: Transforming a Learning Community

The story of the school is the ongoing, everyday struggle to get it right for kids. And the staff members haven't just adopted the rhetoric of doing the best they can for kids in terms of curriculum, in terms of teaching, in terms of program response to kids' needs and to the community's needs. It's not just these things they do, it's their throwing themselves into the program like they have every single day, re-creating it, being active, being involved.
– Tom Poetter (observation notes)

So what really happened to this school when it received the Venture Capital grant and used the AS model? How did things change? What did the school look like? How did it function? How did it affect the primary stakeholders?

As members of the school community have stated here previously, Miami East North is a different place than it was five years ago. The reasons for those changes and this general transformation are related to the AS model and the change process Venture Capital brought. Community members consistently remark about the atmosphere in the school — how it is open, welcoming and collaborative. They comment on how teaching and learning have changed so that adult and child learning opportunities become powerful, having so often to do with the life of the school, students' interests, and inquiry. They comment on how things fit together now that there is a clear, distinct vision for integration and for working toward that integration.

This chapter tries to give an idea of what changes occurred and how change took place by looking at the stories of the three groups that felt and instituted change: (1) staff, (2) students, and (3) community members, including parents.

Staff Members Change: Collaboration, Integration, and Inquiry-Orientation

I place the story of the changing lives and work of the staff members first in this chapter, because the changes they made on this journey constitute the center of energy for the changes that took place in the entire scene. Staff members aren't more important than students and community members, but it does stand to reason that without the support and movement of the school's staff, any change project is doomed. In this case, the staff supported the project, and not only moved it along but transformed themselves and their work in the process.

> *The real value of AS may be that it creates an independence in the school community in which [the school community] believes it can meet the needs of all students and then use its own expertise to solve the problem. Developing that confidence breeds professionals and community members who are willing to devote time and attempt whatever it takes to meet the needs of individual students. The three principles of AS really are the building blocks. Build on people's strengths, work together towards and common goal, and empower people with responsibility. These principles are not concrete things that you can point out to someone and say, "This is what AS has done for us in this area." It is a way, instead, of thinking and doing things that becomes so natural after a while, you can't remember any other way of doing things. I think the important points in the case study are evident every day at Miami East North Elementary: teachers are working together; all students' needs are met to the best of our ability; the atmosphere in the school is inviting, caring, and professional.* – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach (an electronic-mail response)

Kerry articulates a basic but largely under-appreciated notion of change that informs an understanding of how this school transformed itself: the changes that matter most lie in (1) how we think, and (2) how consistently we base our actions on those thoughts. When a school shifts its way of thinking and acting, everything else shifts, too, including its views of normality and what's right and ethical. In this case, the community values individual students, democratic processes, inquiry, and powerful learning opportunities, among other things. These values govern action, acting as filters through which the community makes judgments about the things it does and should do. And instead of being stultifying, the values are liberating, giving the community the opportunity for the first time to place its actions squarely in line with its intentions. This result is rarely the case in school change, endeavors, for systemic change — the kind that causes individuals and groups to change the way they think and act at the deepest, most basic levels — is the most difficult to engender and support (Sergiovanni, 1996).

Atmospheric Conditions

Ever been on a long, gloomy car ride over the Midwestern plains in the rain? A little rain never hurts, but a bright, clear day sure helps matters. In this case, the atmosphere in the school changed a great deal over the life of the grant. Folks continually commented on how the atmosphere has changed, much of which is due to the changed ideas and practices of the staff.

> *I would say that the single most [important] improvement in that school is the climate. It is very invitational, a happy place. The kids are happy and everybody seems supportive.* – Jeff Lewis, superintendent

> *The most essential changes to me would be the more positive learning environment that is student-oriented; the hands-on mathematics and science; the freedom to express how we feel, knowing that we will not be criticized in any way for how we feel; that together we will work to make something balance. Atmosphere is a major component for change. All these things contribute to developing that atmosphere for learning for the kids.* – Rhea Kirk, first-grade teacher

Lots of elements go into the making of atmosphere. The openness of the staff to sharing classrooms with former outsiders has an impact on atmosphere. The staff welcomes volunteers from the community into the building and colleagues from other classrooms and other schools into their classrooms. Together they make the scene brighter and more alive, because they are making a priceless contribution to the lives of the young, and all parties know it and cherish it.

When students aren't tied to their desks but instead read, write, and inquire together, solve problems, and experience life in meaningful, intellectual ways, then the atmosphere supports learning and the humanity of the educational endeavor. When a staff cares about all kids equally, and each individual uniquely, then all students are included with their special gifts to participate in each school activity, from physical education, to music, to art, to mathematics, to language arts.

The cooking staff sponsors Friends Luncheons, where family and friends of students join the students for lunch in the school cafeteria. The cooking tastes like home; it's one of the best school cafeterias around; I always bought my lunch when I visited. Just come by some Monday in early September when Mary brings red, ripe, finely sliced tomatoes from her garden for everyone to spoon onto their hot tacos. When people share good food, school takes on a home-like flavor and builds a positive atmosphere. These commitments, among so many others, have an impact on atmosphere and contribute greatly to transforming the nature of school for those who experience it, including staff, students, and community members.

The point is that the creation of a new, positive atmosphere in a school building requires systematic, continual attention to the values and actions the school believes are crucial to the life of a healthy,

thriving community in all of its manifestations and programs. This school does this, and in a complex array of ways of which just a few are mentioned above, but many more are mentioned in the course of this text. The staff and community purposefully create a positive atmosphere, a learning environment in which all members are encouraged and permitted to be at their best, free, safe, unthreatened, and cared for.

The Collaborative Route Involves Integration and Inquiry

People in this scene could make most of their own decisions if they wanted to (they still make a lot of them on their own; what teacher doesn't?). But staff members don't spend their time doing things on their own anymore. Instead, they work together.

> *There's more collegiality among the staff now. There are more parents working on cadres and more volunteers in the classrooms. But mostly the staff working together has helped. Not that some of us didn't work together before, but there's more of that now.* – Linda Roth, second-grade teacher

> *I think people are closer now. We work even more closely together than ever. I think there always was some intra-grade level communication, but I think that has really increased since I've been here, as well as the interpersonal and inter-grade level communication and working together. We teach classes together, bring students together. I think a lot more of that is occurring now than it ever did before.* – Barb Forsthoefel, kindergarten teacher

One factor in particular has had a unique role to play in building this new sense of collaboration: the inquiry process. I haven't treated the inquiry process with much depth so far, mostly because I am saving a longer treatment of it for Chapter four, "Change Snapshots." But the inquiry process informs so many of the changes that took place in this scene. So here I will explain a bit about the inquiry process and suggest initially how it had an enormous impact on transforming the school, especially the lives and work of the staff members.

The AS movement places the inquiry process at the center of the change process. People engage in inquiry as a means for supporting a democratic decision-making process in which all have a voice. The inquiry process supports the other structural and procedural innovations such as cadres and taking stock. Inquiry is what cadres do; inquiry is what taking stock truly is. In this sense, inquiry is the pervasive link throughout this change effort. To be honest, inquiry was and is the most difficult, challenging aspect of the transformation, and yet the key, energizing link to making a complete shift in the school. By extension, the inquiry process becomes the primary mode in the classroom as well. By engaging in inquiry with students, teachers transform their practice from providing information to students, to teaching them to become inquiring problem-solvers themselves.

Here's how the inquiry process is supposed to work. The inquiry process, especially as it is employed in the structural components of the movement, such as in the cadres and taking-stock

processes, involves laying out problems and developing hypotheses that address those problems. Cadres design a research strategy to study the problems and test the hypotheses. They collect data, deliberate using consensus, and implement the best possible solution. Now the staff and school community don't opt for quick solutions when they identify a problem. Instead they inquire, by studying the problem and coming up with viable solutions from which to choose together.

There is no way to engage in inquiry in a school setting that is democratic without collaborating. Democracy requires collaboration; they turn on each other and must co-exist in a democratic culture. No one can do all of the work by oneself; no one can make all of the decisions, informed or uninformed, by oneself. Suddenly, the responsibility for generating knowledge, clear representations of problems, and possible solutions becomes a matter for the whole community, especially the staff, as opposed to merely the principal. Most every decision has a bearing on the school atmosphere and the quality of learning that takes place in the school. Therefore, the theory goes, the school community ought to be involved in a deep way in the processes that lead to decision making. In an AS school, this pervasive process is the inquiry process.

How Inquiry Has a Profound Impact on Collaboration and Integration

> *Sometimes I say to myself, "Well, why doesn't somebody just make a decision for us and we'll follow the decision?" And that would just be the way it is. But when you look at it over the long run, somebody's always making a decision for you. And are you really looking at all the possibilities? You wind up just following that one possibility. The way we're doing it, we have to look at a variety of possibilities and choose what most people think is the best choice. I think the curriculum cadre came up with a good idea with the planning days which happen for each team twice a month, which has been very helpful. I would never have thought of that. I don't think the administrators would have thought of that. A group came up with the solution together.* – Chuck Martin, fourth-grade teacher

The school had identified the problem that the teachers needed more planning time in order to put together the types of challenging, interest-based, real-life, powerful learning experiences that would best serve the students. The short 45-minute blocks of time for planning they had every day just didn't allow for the type of collaboration needed among grade levels to generate a great, inclusive curriculum for all learners. So after a lengthy inquiry process and deliberations, the curriculum cadre came up with the solution of providing two half-days per month for teacher planning and studied means for putting it in place so the school community could consider it for implementation. What has occurred as a result of the use of the extended planning time is a heightened sense of collaboration possible between and among teachers and staff.

I was able to spend some time with Chuck and Amy during the day talking about the special programs on Japan coming up for Right to Read Week. The teachers are very excited about the focus on Japan for the week and all the activities they are planning that really push the students deeply into literature and culture. They are making big plans to decorate and engage the students in wide reading and intellectual activities about Japan. They showed me their curriculum materials during their planning period today. They had all of a half-day to continue working on their planning, with so much to do and so much accomplished. They commented on how they had been having parent volunteers helping them do cutting and pasting activities necessary for getting materials ready for student projects. As we sat and talked and worked, Chuck laid out all of the activities for the fourth grade for the week. Amy is working on her origami, and she and Chuck bantered about how poorly she was doing trying to get her origami cranes (the bird!) right for the lesson. You can sense the excitement that the teachers have as they create activities and the upcoming unit. They learn as they create curriculum. They engage in intellectual activity as they seek to find new ways of transmitting and drawing out knowledge from their students. – Tom Poetter (observation notes)

This extra time makes it possible to plan an inter- and intra-level curriculum and to make the special curriculum offerings such as the "family" lessons possible. The family lessons focus on the three principles of AS, engage the students in mixed-age groups, and are taught by all members of the school community (I even taught one lesson on building on strengths when Jim had to be away at a meeting!). The family groups have 15 members from kindergarten through the fourth grade. The family curriculum offerings integrate student learning and extend the purpose, vision, and mission of the school into the community. The family groups have been a primary link between the school and the residents of Heartland Manor Nursing Home, for instance, a community institution whose members have become recent "grandparents" for students in the family groups.

I think we're accelerated because we have all the kids from all grade levels working together. From the governance side, all the teachers are working together, but then we've got all the kids mixed together and they are working together, too. We're still working on giving the students decision-making capability, but just seeing them work together and come up with ideas — that's one great thing I've seen come out of our work. – Misty Ellis, first-grade teacher

The inquiry process has become a pervasive and crucial link among the various movements that have transformed the school. Inquiry affects the governance of the school and the establishment of transformative, democratic processes, as well as the types of things that happen in the classroom. Inquiry con-

tributes to the collaborative culture that is developing in this school, as it draws people together into a learning community that extends across boundaries in the school and in the community.

The types of integration for learning and transforming school culture as envisioned by curriculum theorist Beane (1997) become apparent when the array of curricular opportunities for powerful learning emerges in this school over the course of years. Beane clarifies four aspects of integration: integration of experience, social integration, integration of knowledge, integration as a curriculum design — categories which closely resemble the notion of powerful learning in the AS model. Meaningful or powerful learning for Beane and for AS integrates real-life experiences and extends the concepts of self and society that students bring to real-life learning situations. Meaningful or powerful learning breaks down the isolation and fragmentation of subjects and is undertaken systematically to examine issues of personal and social significance (pp. 4-9).

Thus, when second graders author their own books on geometric shapes they find and photograph in the school; when fourth graders plan and experience Pioneer Day, dipping their own wax candles and spinning their own woolen strings with local pioneer experts; when first graders test common household implements for their sink/float capacities and then create charts on their own to track results; when the students and the entire school adopt a nursing home and establish relationships with new "grandparents" there; when students create web pages depicting local history based on the autobiographies of senior citizens in the community; when students plan, finance, and build a land lab to use for environmental learning projects, then students and staff are doing more than breaking down barriers among academic disciplines. They are transforming curriculum and learning to reflect a concept of powerful learning that transcends subject boundaries and extends the purpose of schooling outside the four walls into the life of the community from which students and teachers draw their lives and energies in the first place.

This school is different now, because these types of powerful learning opportunities are no longer an exception but the rule. They come about now regularly and as a central focus, because the school first decided what it believes and why. Then it decided how it would go about changing. The growth here reveals commitments to connecting teaching, learning, curriculum, social growth, democratic processes, and care for the school and all individuals as capable, contributing members by engaging in deep, thoughtful inquiry that fosters collaboration and integration. What the school has as a result are relationships and processes that have a profound impact on individuals and culture on a daily basis. This constitutes true transformation, the systematic, human kind that reveals itself in the lives of the participants and in the humanity of their institutions.

Continuing Professional Development Supports

Collaboration, Integration, and Inquiry

In Chapter two, I chronicled several important professional-development events and explained how the continual attention to the school through the structures of the AS model contributes to the pro-

fessional development of the staff and the ongoing success of students and the model. But key professional-development events occurred throughout the life of the grant and past the first year of implementation as well. Several professional events stand out as key to the staff's ongoing growth and transformation.

The summer retreats held just before the start of each school year not only support and foster commitments to the school and to the staff team but rejuvenate personal lives and connections as well. The retreats always have both a programmatic structure/focus and a social agenda. The retreats always take place off-campus and out of town, giving the staff needed distance and space to think and to reconnect. Retreat programs have focused on team-building, the AS model, and the inquiry process, among other topics and concerns.

This continual commitment to a yearly event complements the ongoing programs that the school provides for staff and that it enables staff to attend outside the school. Inside and outside the school, the staff participates sparingly in one-shot inservices. While these might serve as a helpful introduction to an innovation, for instance, they don't reflect the core value of finding and possessing expertise in the school itself or to making change over time through long-term, considered commitments. Instead, the staff seeks ways to engage in ongoing, programmatic development through the institution of a new learning or teaching strategy, for instance, and then revisiting that shift with follow-up sessions. The staff wants to participate in substantive, culture-changing activities, not spurious, short-sighted ones.

> Jim: *One of the best staff-development activities I think that happened here was the interactive writing seminar we did (in conjunction with a team from South Elementary School in the District), in part because of the way it was structured. Interactive writing is a process for teaching children kindergarten through second grade how to write; it's based on the Reading Recovery program which we are using. We selected this program through the Curriculum Cadre that year. Our kindergarten and first-grade teachers had a two-day summer session with an educator on this program. She followed up that two-day summer session with four visits throughout the fall. During these visits, the teachers would talk about issues involved with what they learned from the trainer in the early sessions. The educator would demonstrate the techniques with a real class on each of her visits. Then the teachers would demonstrate in front of a live class, and then they would debrief about it at the end of the day. The teachers involved did that four times.*

> Kerry: *The trainer started out in the summer with questions like, "What is happening in your classroom that you really know kids are learning? What's really powerful in your language arts program?" So we started there, learning from each other. The teachers said, "That is great. I want to try that in my classroom." So that was the foundation for this building process, in which the trainer would ask the teachers, "Now, where do you want your students to go?" and then we would brainstorm ideas together. And then we would try ideas out in*

> *the classroom, discuss what did and didn't work, what we needed to change. And then we'd go back into the classroom and try again. We did that two or three times each time we were working in the school. So, it turned out to be the most powerful professional development I've ever been involved in. It was really hard, especially when you're in the classroom modeling and you've got eight of your colleagues sitting there watching you. But it was effective. (cross-case interview)*

Also, the school has been able to sponsor the staff's attendance at the National AS Conference (because of costs, only teachers and trained coaches could attend). The St. Louis AS meeting in 1996 proved to be a monumental occasion, not only giving several staff members their first opportunity to attend a national education conference, but also building their confidence about being on the right track, reassuring them that they are not alone in their struggles, and providing opportunities to learn great ideas and strategies from others struggling with similar issues in the AS process. The team is planning to attend the next national meeting in 1998.

> *We learned so much from the St. Louis meeting. We were able to talk to other schools that were going through the same process. It helped me to realize that we weren't the only ones not really understanding what we were doing: that everybody was kind of in the same boat, and that it's a process that you have to work through, and that you don't just change. It takes a long time to make change. I think in the past we've put Band-Aids on things just to try to fix them. Now we're realizing that in order to make permanent change, we need to really go through the inquiry process and decide what it is that needs to be done and work through it.* – Amy Dawson, fourth-grade teacher

The journey to St. Louis itself provided several new twists for the staff and the transformation of the school. Several members had never flown before. Flying for the first time constituted a major step. One teacher would not fly, so another teacher took the bus in order to keep the non-flier company. No one goes it alone. There came a point in the preparation for the trip when some conflicts among people brewed to a boiling point, the key issue being a disagreement over the color of the sweatshirts the group decided to buy and wear in honor of the trip. Silly? Maybe. Typical? Probably.

At the conference, because of the shirt-color fiasco and several other conflicts, Kerry made personal decisions that she wouldn't carry the burden of coaching anymore and that it was time to back away from her leadership role. Several teachers decided to take the coaches training in order to share ownership and responsibilities of the program. This period marked a time when everyone felt a sense of fatigue — an implementation dip, if you will. The events, both good and bad, led Kerry and Jim to recognize that several members of the staff really did support the movement in word and deed, and that the trip played an important role in re-energizing the staff. It helped to infuse a new sense of confidence and a new, shared responsibility for leadership.

You know, when we came back from the trip, one of the teachers whom I thought was not really supportive of AS said, "You know, we should've been presenters at the conference." I thought to myself, "You didn't even want to do this in the first place!" I think this teacher was right: we should have presented at the conference, and I bet at the next one we will. But an event like this one really builds confidence. And there were newspaper articles written about the trip. When teachers get public recognition, that really builds confidence. This sometimes motivates future risk taking; people are now looking to them for leadership. The St. Louis trip was a major success. It brought us right out of the implementation dip. – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

Personal Shifts Toward Teaching

The shifts that staff members have made to reflect their commitments to the AS model and to what they think is good pedagogy in the classroom and school community reveal the deep changes that have taken place in the school. Related to the idea of collaboration is the perception that the staff really gets along now, better than it ever did before. The staff values getting along, not to sugarcoat problems, but to establish a collegial, supportive working environment.

For me, personally, I think I really enjoy coming to school in the morning, and it hasn't always been that way in my 17 years here. We just really get along. There is a chemistry. There was a time when we didn't all get along. We were out for ourselves maybe — I don't know if that's the way to put that or not — and not so concentrated on the students. And I think that's so important. Students are the main focus, and I don't know if they always have been. – Amy Dawson, fourth-grade teacher

The staff supports each member by including him or her in the functions of the school and by having high expectations that each person will function at a high level, even carrying the leadership (facilitator) role in meetings when necessary. This caring, supportive culture extends to all members of the community. Staff feel it daily.

Tom: *How have you felt about your role on the cadres?*

Mary: *Well, I've felt like they have listened to what I have to say.*

Tom: *People ask you questions and care about what you have to say?*

Mary: *Yes. This is a good building for that.*

Tom: *Has it always been that way?*

Mary: *I think it's getting better that way. When I first started, I wasn't familiar with the teachers, and now everybody's like a family. My feeling is that we seem to be more of a team and work together better, care for one another.* – Everett (school cook)

Mary, along with her duties as head cook, teaches one of the family units in the school. Her cafeteria assistant, Ellee, co-teaches the group. The day I filled in for Jim teaching the family about building on strengths, I co-taught with the custodian, Bob. Everyone participates in the life of the school, at all levels. This is a remarkable, powerful, and special set of circumstances.

The staff also has a sense of enthusiasm for teaching, children, and the life of the school that works its way into every heartbeat of the school's days, weeks, months, years. Amy connects the presence of enthusiasm with the valuing of children as the center of the school.

> *For the most part, I see enthusiasm among the staff members in their really wanting to help kids who need help. And I see happy kids as a result. Even those students who are struggling, we've worked hard to find ways of helping them. It's important not to make those kids feel that they're not as good because maybe they don't learn in a certain way. I think that we have to provide different ways of learning so that all kids learn. And they can all learn.* – Amy Dawson, fourth-grade teacher

> *What I've seen is that everybody is looking at his or her own teaching practices and asking, "How can we make this better?" And instead of just saying, "I've been doing this for seven years and this is how I do it," they look at their plans and look for ways to make learning more exciting and more powerful for the kids.* – Misty Ellis, first-grade teacher

As Misty suggests, the faculty has become more reflective and discerning with regard to teaching and the curriculum. It is constantly seeking better ways to teach and more interesting, learning-filled activities in which students can participate and create. I look more closely at this shift in Chapter four, but Chuck's comments epitomize the new focus that teachers and staff have about teaching in this new school environment.

> *The changes in my teaching are tremendous because, before I came here, I was regimented — "Here's your row. Here's your row. Here's your row.... And here's the textbook." And I'd get up and talk to kids about the textbook. Now, my teaching and classroom are so much more activity-based, manipulative-based, literature-based. I was not that way before. The teaching partner aspect of this job (Amy is his fourth-grade partner) was a major part of the change, as well as using more inquiry in the classroom, and cooperative learning, which all fit the AS model. That has changed tremendously.* – Chuck Martin, fourth-grade teacher

The changes that have taken place among the staff since the implementation of the AS model suggest a profound shift in how staff members think of their work and go about it together. Their work has had an impact on students, and vice versa.

Students Change: Engaged, Challenged, Empowered

Happiness Is

I like coming every day and every teacher — if I'm walking by in the hallway, everybody is always happy to see me and they'll say "hi" and stuff. I'm just really happy to see people.
– A fourth grader

It may sound trite, but this school is a happy place. I've never seen so many well-adjusted, spirited, bright kids working together with caring, smart, well-prepared adults in all my school days. There's no way they could have faked it I was there too often, among them learning, participating in class, and teaching, for heaven's sake. Now, you might think I'm seeing this school and its community members through rose-colored glasses because I like them, because I want to paint a nice picture of their work. These things are all true to some degree. But give me a little credit, some leeway at least. I know that a lot of the kids in this school have what other school communities would call "average" intelligence; other schools would track them down to at least the low track, because they show few of the classic symptoms of having school success. Many of the students who thrive at North would be buried in special education classes in other schools that view kids differently, as deficient, as needing to be "fixed," and therefore referred out of class because of some minor set of difficulties that too many overwhelmed teachers quickly turn over to someone else.

What happens to kids when they have a steady dose of success in school? They thrive, and they work, and they grow, and they love school. These students and the staff have made this a great place to be together. Things happen here.

So Much to Do

Look for signs that something is really going on in an elementary school. All of the walls are decorated with student work, even the cafeteria walls. Students move about the school. Classroom doors stand open. Students are reading and solving problems. Students actually use the computers in the classroom. Students routinely work with peers, ask questions, conduct their own research, inquire. Teachers move about the room. Students move about the classroom or sit with others in circles facing each other. The principal constantly moves in and out of classrooms, day to day, in a non-threatening, participatory way. Students confidently approach adults, sharing their work and ideas freely. Students work on addition, certainly, but mainly they work on ways to apply addition in the real world. Students work on problems and with skills on projects that may begin in the classroom, but the projects almost always extend beyond it. These are things you would see routinely on visits to this school. It is no wonder that parents and children speak of students being challenged and engaged in this school. They are.

So much happens when students are doing things and not just made to listen passively to adults supposedly imparting wisdom and crucial information. There is whole group instruction, of course, but it's not the endless, droning-on-forever kind with which we all grew up. These kids learn with coaches who engage them, participate in learning with them, and invite them to do things together.

Building Relationships with Adults, Creating Community

These students know about community. They build it new together and with their teachers every day. I found this out through the students' efforts with me. The students typically greeted me with open arms, hugs, welcoming remarks, questions:

> *"Are you going to stay and read with us?"*
>
> *"Would you like to see our origami?"*
>
> *"Would you hold my candles while they cool?"*

When Chuck Martin asked me to read with one of the fourth-grade reading groups studying Native American literature, the students told me the procedure, what my role was, when I would participate. Self-governing, active learning dominates the center of their existences here, and evidence existed that these children were learning to transfer their academic and social learning into healthy, productive relationships with adults.

I have worked in or visited so many tightly controlled, regimented, worksheet-driven elementary schools where students shy away from adults, scared of making mistakes, uncertain of the risks. "Why stick my neck out" they ask inside. Why should they, indeed? But here, students and staff members have relationships. Real, maturing, give-and-take relationships. Ted Sizer (1996), the school reformer who has seen and done much in the movement to transform the bureaucratic, inhumane monster the American high school has become, believes there is a central factor for transforming schools in the future: recognizing that "the heart of schooling is found in relationships between student, teacher, and ideas" (p. xiii).

Truly, rethinking and remaking the notion of what relationships can be like between adults and children and ideas in schools constitutes a crucial set of first steps for transforming a learning community. But how does this happen? It happens when teachers assume that students know something when they come to class and can learn when they get there. It happens when teachers have high expectations for students and help them reach their capacities to both enjoy and work at learning. It happens when teachers view referring a student for special services only as very last resort, when something is terribly wrong. Otherwise, the classroom is the place to address individual problems and needs, right along with peers, in with the rest of the students. It happens when the community requires that students take responsibility for their own and each other's learning. It happens when the community expects that students will make a contribution to the community as a whole through their learning, that they will be active members of the community, working to transform it from the earliest school age.

Everyone has high expectations for each other in this scene. This translates into much action, students working to learn and teachers working to teach better. But at root lies a commitment to respect for the other. When this condition exists, people know they belong, they feel safe to take risks and succeed, and they take joy in the deeper aspects of human relationships such as laughing together, sharing stories and lives, and celebrating accomplishments.

One of the keys to shifting to building relationships with students rather than trying to control them (which is impossible anyway, by the way) lies in the staff's general commitment to turning the school over to students, or at least toward shifting control over their learning back to students. What is usually missed is that children cannot fully be themselves and grow in school unless adults shift their ideas about their own role in teaching them and in trying to control them in that scene. What students and school reformers are counting on, but don't quite know how to make happen, the teachers and staff made happen here. The students are the primary beneficiaries. Instead of learning from proud, pompous, self-righteous adults, they learn with caring, loving, listening, and smart adults. This makes all the difference in the world.

> *When I don't understand something that is happening, the AS model has enabled me to let go of some of the control issues in my classroom and to give that control to the students without feeling like I was neglecting my leadership responsibilities as a teacher. Giving students a lot of the control over their own education and the responsibility that goes with it is hard. You know, we all have this idea that teachers are supposed to fix and plan and solve everything. Not anymore. I grew up in that realm, where students did exactly what teachers said, when they said it, in the desk sitting down. I don't think we have that here, and I've been able to start developing it myself.* – Rhea Kirk, first-grade teacher

Students Become Activists for Their Own Learning and Their Community

The opportunities for extending learning beyond the classroom and into meaningful, real-life experiences exist in abundance at North. The student cadre is called Power Kids; fourth graders each get a turn to serve on the cadre facilitated by Linda Roth (Jim has served in the past as faculty liaison to the group). This is the official link between the student body members, their concerns and ideas, and the AS process. And they have made the most of their opportunities to speak up and take action along with their teachers and other staff members. Several examples reveal the depth of student involvement in the school.

The family groups meet in the school on a periodic basis, with fourth graders providing much leadership, guidance, and assistance for younger members of the group as they work together on projects and assignments (remember, families are groups of 15 students and staff teachers from all areas and grades in the school). An extension of the family groups' work has been their newfound connections with their new grandparents at Heartland Manor. Fourth graders and the Power Kids cadre have taken the lead in establishing contact with their new grandparents, visiting the Manor as a group. One of their

ideas, connected with their classwork, is to conduct interviews with senior citizens and use the data they generate together to construct a collective, autobiographical history of the county on an Internet webpage.

> *Right now we are trying to make a webpage. We're going to ask our grandparents what they did back then, what sports they played, what school was like, some history facts. We came up with about 24 questions to ask. And we are going to make a sheet with the questions, make a schedule to meet with our grandparents, and ask them the questions.* – A fourth-grade student

As I mentioned earlier, students have become active in planning, funding, and building a land laboratory for environmental education purposes on the school grounds. The school community supported the students' ideas and their efforts, pitching in as much as they could in their "Lincolns for the Land Lab" fund drive (students deposited pennies in glass jars to collect enough money to purchase the materials for starting the laboratory).

> *We're thinking of making a land lab. It's for science, and we're going to have it out in the field where that big tree is. We're going to try to plant pine trees. We might have a couple of bushes along one of the fences where the tree is. And then we might try to put prairie plants on the old baseball diamond. And maybe, we're just thinking possibly about making a small pond.* – A fourth-grade student

Students planted the first plants and trees for the land laboratory in the spring of 1998.

The most intense and transformational activity that the students have been involved in is learning sign language. The staff originated the idea, but the students have caught on like gangbusters. One of the kindergarten students is deaf. The school community — anticipating, of course, that the student will stay at North all five years of early schooling — decided to learn sign language together in order to communicate. Everywhere I turn, students and faculty practice their signs with each other. And they talk to the student.

> *We're all learning sign language so we can speak without asking the interpreter. Our sign teacher comes around, teaches us new stuff, and we review.* – A fourth grade-student

Everyone Is Included

> *The AS model has a belief that the children should be able to learn in the classroom. And I believe that, too. The thing that we have tried to pick up at South, or I've tried to pick up from North and run back down here and promote, is the idea of meeting these kids' needs within the classroom wherever we can and trying to give them all a chance at success within the classroom. That's the thing that I think is most important.* – Rick Hacker, South Elementary School principal

Inclusion sounds so reasonable, and right. It is ethical, democratic, and the law (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). But it is so hard for schools and teachers to do the work of inclusion, mostly because people have never done it before and because their ideas stand in the way, especially the idea that some are capable of learning in school and some are not. And schools hide behind the notion that a continuum of services gives teachers and schools an out; that is, providing separate, self-contained classrooms for some students is part of a continuum of services toward full inclusion (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). No doubt, a few students may not ever be part of an inclusive, regular classroom in an everyday school. But no one at North believes this. They would work with any student who came through the door. All comers are welcome. This school is for everyone, anyone, regardless.

Endless Successes

The successes of the special education students who are fully included in the North program represent one of the most remarkable set of successes in the school.

> *What I really like about North, especially this year, is that we have three very special children. The school has done its best to welcome these children. They are even offering sign language classes. What other school would do that?* – A North parent volunteer

Becoming fully inclusive constitutes a tremendous school reform achievement in and of itself and requires a full treatment, something I can't do here (see Bargerhuff, 1998; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997 for more extensive treatment). Suffice it to say that the movement toward inclusion, which is directly connected to the philosophy of AS and something a school that becomes accelerated agrees to do when it signs on, constitutes one of the many bodies of success for students in this setting.

Students' success stories have been told to me by the staff members. I asked the staff members I interviewed to name successes they have experienced during their work with the grant and the AS model. All of the teachers talked about students, which didn't surprise me. But while so much else has changed and one might expect for someone to mention new structures, or inquiry, or something else besides students as major successes, the teachers remained true to their central commitment by honoring students with their recollections of challenge and success. Following is one representative story.

> *I had one student last year [who] I was really concerned about, and this child had been one of those children who would never get his work done, even with class time — kindergarten, first, second, and third grade. The teachers didn't know what to do with him. They just had no idea. We were all in the same boat. He ended up sitting out in the hall. We did some things as a group. We made decisions that were not good for that kid. Finally, we figured out that this child might have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) without the hyperactivity. He just was not able to get his work done. So his parents took him to have him evaluated, and they found that he had ADD and put him on medication.... Last year he was in my class all of the time. He was never sent out in the hall. He still didn't get a lot of his*

work done, but he heard everything that we talked about. He passed most of the proficiency tests except for the reading part, and, to me, that was such a success. He was able to learn. He didn't have to write everything down. Not all kids are going to learn that way. He was learning it by hearing it and he did learn it. It was obvious. I think that sometimes we don't take the time to really figure out what the kid needs. We expect them to all do the same thing, and it's not fair treating kids all the same way, because they're all different. – Amy Dawson, fourth-grade teacher

Community Members Change: Invited, Involved, Included

When my son was in third grade, the teachers offered Family Mathematics Night. Some of the parents were totally clueless about their children's homework. So the staff opened up the school at night and really helped a lot of the parents. The parents who went through the class were not afraid to go up to another parent and say, "I'm having a problem with this; how do you address it?" That's what's so special about North. It's like a close-knit family. – A North parent volunteer

An Open Invitation

One of the first, most important things that Jim did as principal was respond to a standing invitation from local church members to volunteer their time to the school. They had been rebuffed in the past, but now Jim warmly accepted their overtures to participate in the life of the school. He thereby reversed the role of invitation, turning it on its ear and transforming the community by accepting others in as a first step, not necessarily by inviting them first but by responding to *their* interests first. Now the open invitation to participate is two-way: community members have a standing invitation to participate in the life of the school, and the school has a standing invitation to participate in the life of the community. This is ideal.

I think the volunteer program we have meets the ideas of the model for bringing in community. The model teaches us to look for community resources. What we have is the missionary society from the local church that sends people to help students with reading. And along with that there are parents that come in and work with the kids. So the teachers have a wealth of resources in terms of community volunteers that can come in and help. There are volunteers in some of our classrooms everyday. The staff plans activities for the "grandparents" to work with the kids. We serve the community by caroling to shut-ins at the holidays with the missionary society. It's been a back-and-forth thing. We have really developed a relationship with our community church since the inception of AS. The volunteer program helps us a lot, and there is lots of little networking that goes in the community to let you know when someone needs something. And the people are always there. That's part of AS: building a community network. – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

You walk in the building and see kids and volunteers on the floor, on the chairs out in the hall, just everybody working together. So you can physically see the difference between this school and another school that doesn't support volunteers. And it's a lot louder around here, because volunteers are doing some many really cool things. – A North parent volunteer

I continually saw and met community members in the building. It would be impossible to recount all of my encounters with them here, though it is safe to say I saw them involved in a wide array of school activities, including, for example: working individually with students; helping teachers prepare materials for class; participating in cadre meetings; creating school publications to disseminate to the entire community; supervising special events; volunteering as guest speakers. Parents believed their activities, along with other community members in the school, to be representative of an important shift in the culture of the school and the staffs' perceptions of the community's potential contributions.

I think the teachers welcome the parents to be involved through the volunteer program. And we give the teachers more time to do the things they need to do by coming in. I have told the teachers that I will do anything they want me to do- — cut, clean, anything. It allows them to do their job better, and I think they are getting used to all of us. Hopefully it's not stressful for them to have us around. – A North parent volunteer

Teachers ask for my opinions on things, and I feel real good about that. I don't believe that they are asking me as parent; I've been here so long that I think they just think of me as one of them. – A North parent volunteer

After a child had been reading with me, I might be upstairs eating lunch and talking to her teacher and the teacher would be asking me questions. I would tell the teacher, "Well, this person's doing really well on this and this." It was nice for the teacher to be asking me questions. I thought, "You want my opinion?" – A North parent volunteer

A wonderful transformation occurs when people see each other as equally capable, contributing members of a learning community. Not only are the volunteers capable and helpful people, but the staff recognizes these qualities in the individuals and in their contributions. Instead of feeling threatened or burdened by volunteers' contributions, teachers actually relish and value them. Teachers view themselves as continuous learners engaged in learning activities with each other, students, parents, and community members. Hence everybody has something to offer, and the contributions are welcome. The usual barriers just don't exist here, and these new colleagues don't press them into existence.

Participation

The school community has enjoyed a groundswell in volunteer activity (the school's records indicate approximately 2,000 volunteer hours are officially logged each year) since the beginning of the school change project. Most in the school are extremely happy with the support community members

give. But there is still some tension in this school community regarding participation. The tension, I think, revolves around a shift in our culture that the school hasn't figured out how to battle, or even whether it should. While community members and parents turn out for events and scheduled visits, some in the school community lament the lower participation being seen for traditional events, like parent-teacher conferences. Many parents turn out, but many do not.. One of the main problems is the competition for community members' and parents' time. They can't go to every meeting for the community and for their children, given work and family schedules. If things are going well — which they are for many students — some parents don't see the point in coming in. We can't always change such behavior, let alone the problem of unconcerned parents who make no attempt to get involved.

The issue has come to a head in the school, because community members' attendance had dropped at both the cadre meetings and the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings, while the participation and morale in the school community generally seems on the rise.

> *We do not have a lot of participation in terms of numbers, as far as the PTO and maybe the cadres go, but when we need help, it is always there. If we need cookies donated, we have masses and masses of cookies.* – A North parent volunteer

One possible explanation for this seeming paradox — that is, there seems to be lots of community participation in the life of the school and yet it also appears not to be so — is that parents are just spread too thin by extracurricular activities their children are engaged in and by their own work, among other things. These parents care, but they often need to know the specific time, place and task in order to be able to make a contribution. And the school has responded to this fact by putting out calls to specific people for things it needs instead of always casting a net, though it still sometimes takes this broader approach for gathering participation as well. While the school doesn't view community participation as a problem, it is attuned to the fluidity of participation, how things change, how it can be fostered on a day-to-day basis. Also, it may be that many parents and community members do not feel adequately prepared to make substantive contributions to cadres, so they never try. Maybe they still retain the view that school decisions lie outside their purview and control. The school constantly works at this problem, inviting and informing community members at every turn. As we will see in Chapter four, The Parent Involvement Cadre addressed the problem of participation systematically during the school year 1997-98.

Communication

At the heart of the school's success in bringing parents and community members into the school and finding places for students to learn outside of school lies the extensive communication network the school has built regarding its day-to-day functions and its connections with the AS movement. In Chapter two, I laid out the means through which the school distributes knowledge to the community regarding its activities and programs. Its array of publications can help tie things together, from simple, factual information about when events will occur, to what and how students are doing in the classroom. Publications

keep people up to date, informed, and knowledgeable about life in school and in the community. Sound, open communication enables the community to connect to the life of the school.

You will notice that not just school members contribute to the flow of information about the school. Community members do as well. This two-way flow shows how conjoined the school is now with the community, how the two thrive on each other's energy. Actually, the weekly newsletter's focus emerged as an idea out of cadre work that suggested that parents and community members needed another outlet through which to get school news, especially information about how AS is working and what and how students are doing in class.

> *We've got a schoolwide newsletter now that goes home every Monday from Mr. Gay. A parent volunteer puts the newsletter together. Teachers put items in it on a continuing basis with examples of student work from each of the grade levels. That idea came out of the cadres, and that's been very positive. And now we have interest groups in the community that send in articles they want us to put in. You know, like the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts, and the Village of Fletcher is getting ready to have its 150th Birthday Celebration. The village puts little things in the newsletter. We put things in about voting, the time change that's coming up — just things that tie things in school and in the community together.*
> – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

The school and the community are very proud of the network of participation and volunteerism that they have built up together. In the school and village there is a sense of goodwill; this sense gets translated into true action that changes the lives of children. When people are active and becoming part of the scene, then the scene changes and transforms itself. In this case, the school has become a true community, not only building on its own strengths and developing its own best practices, but doing so in part by drawing on the best the community has to offer by way of human contact, activity, and resources. As a result, the community changes, too, for the better, as it plays a direct and active role in the lives of the young.

This chapter reveals aspects of the transformations that occurred over the life of the grant, and that are still taking shape among the staff, students, and school community. In general, the school has navigated complicated changes in the way it works, in what it believes. Daily, the school community supports in action a commitment to making the school a better place to be for everyone. And this means everyone, regardless of who they are and what they can or cannot do when they start out. What is important are commitments, on everyone's part, to growth, effort and care. While the Accelerated Schools model helps people push boundaries, ask new questions, and consider new directions, it also helps people remain grounded in what's important: that is, the school's vision and the values embedded in the things people do on a daily basis to educate each other well. In a sense, then, the model and the school give members the opportunities to live out this important tension, continually defining the order within which the school will freely pursue the best possible elementary school experience for students,

teachers, and the community. This is the essence of a democratic school, where the paths are built by the people making the trek together, figuring things out together on the way.

Chapter four, "Change Snapshots," develops several more in-depth pictures of important stops on this journey. I hope that these snapshots capture several major aspects of the changes and change processes that have occurred in the school community over the life of the grant, and bring into focus the types of things that happened and are happening here.

Chapter Four

Change Snapshots: Great Stops Along the Way

Creating a Montage

Looking at the pictures taken on a memorable journey is one of my favorite things to do after a great trip. Sometimes the best shots of my favorite places make it into one of those big picture frames with room for a bunch of shots, or an album I can open easily and leaf through on a whim. If I plan it right, I can get a whole trip into one of those frames or albums, and later savor the memories. A picture can bring to mind a bundle of memories, feelings, and ideas, all at once. A montage increases, at least for me, the memory of the experience and, after a while, maybe even the experience itself.

What I want to do in this chapter is capture a few of the significant stops that this school made along the way. Snapshots have value not only for the traveler who has been on the trip, but also for the traveler contemplating a journey.

I look, therefore, at four significant stops, places, or events along the way that warrant further explanation, or at least a sharper picture. First, I examine in more detail the inquiry process, how it has developed at the school, and how it has made a contribution both to the governance of the school, and to reforming the teaching and learning taking place in classrooms. Second, I examine leadership in the school as it has emerged among the entire staff, but especially as it was exhibitied by the principal, Jim Gay. Third, Kerry Elifritz, the first AS coach at the school (along with Jim), writes about the role of the AS coach and the attendant joys and problems of that position in this school. And last, I discuss several images of Best Practices in the school, examples of when the vision of the school seemed to be playing itself out in the classroom.

Change Snapshot 1

Inquiry Constitutes the Core of the AS Movement in This School

> *Inquiry is a process, based on the scientific research method, which allows the members of a school community to isolate the root causes of a challenge, to explain that challenge deeply, and to identify and implement the most effective method for overcoming the challenge. Members of the school community's cadres start the Inquiry Process by forming and testing hypotheses about the self-identified challenge area. Next, cadre members brainstorm possible solutions. After synthesizing those solutions and developing an action plan, cadres pilot test their plan. Finally, the plan is evaluated and the challenge reassessed, and the reflective Inquiry Process starts anew. The use of this careful and systematic process is one of the most significant ways that accelerated schools differ from traditional schools. However, Inquiry provides school communities with some of the most formidable components of the accelerated schools process precisely because it runs directly counter to deeply entrenched cultural norms that demand quick solutions to problems.* (Levin, 1995)

The inquiry process — as it is used both in the governance of the school and as a pedagogical approach in the classroom — constitutes the core of the AS movement and the change process in the school. Inquiry ties together several complex notions. It connects the democratic processes surrounding shared decision making by providing the vehicle for everyone to contribute to the conversation. Everyone helps define problems, study them, create solutions, and try them out. Inquiry allows people in this scene, both individually and collectively, to come up with their own understandings about what is happening, what needs to happen, and how it should happen. Thus, inquiry provides the vehicle for collaboration on a deeper level; the process pervades everything that the school does in the community, boardroom, corridor, and classroom (Thiessen, 1993). Inquiry, therefore, provides the key for integrating people, ideas, strategies, and programs together. As a result of constituting the center of activity for change, inquiry as a process bears a lot of figurative weight in terms of responsibility. No doubt some strain will come to bear when so much rests on some one thing, and it did in this scene.

One of the strains accompanying the inquiry process has to do with understanding what inquiry is and how it works. This is no easy first step according to the school community at North. Another strain accompanying the inquiry process has to do with making inquiry work, mostly by shifting how we think of human action, and learning by adjusting our senses of time and action. The problem is that we generally like to solve problems by proposing and implementing solutions to perceived problems quickly. The inquiry process instead makes people focus on the problem at least as much as the solution, thereby requiring that we make more considered and informed judgments than we are generally used to making anywhere, including in schools.

Another strain accompanying the inquiry process rests in the wide variation of legitimate definitions for inquiry. The questions then become, "Is my version of inquiry the same as or as good as yours? Are different versions of inquiry compatible, reconcilable in the same scene? What sense of inquiry are we making, how are we using it, and is it having a positive impact here?"

The passages on inquiry in this chapter examine how inquiry looked and worked at this school, in light of these strains and other questions, first by showing how inquiry seemed to be working as a process in the governance of the school, and second by showing how inquiry seemed to be working as a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning in the classroom.

While these snapshots focus in on these strains as outlined here, it is important to recognize that overcoming them has led to a more empowered, liberated, just, and effective set of beliefs, values, and practices in the school. The best trips are always accompanied by bumps in the road.

> *Initially, the inquiry process seems unnatural to the . . . cadres. It takes more patience than they have time for; it requires reflection, participation, research, and discourse. Further, it requires that they implement and evaluate the solutions that they derive. These are very new and unfamiliar roles to staff who have been expected to follow a standard curriculum and focus on compliance with rules, regulations, and standard operating procedures. But, over time teachers and other staff develop the expertise to use the inquiry approach to address even the thorniest issues that arise in the schools. Not only does a school community use the inquiry process in their cadres, but the process becomes the standard approach that teachers use to change their own classroom practices.* (Levin, 1991, p. 3)

Inquiry is a Constant State, a Way of Life

> *There's a big change in that we put out surveys and opinion polls to the community about just about everything we're doing. And they're not long, they're not complicated, but they just keep everything focused. That way we can serve everyone better, because everyone has a voice, even the students. And I think that's exciting. That's a brand new change.* – Rhea Kirk, first-grade teacher

> *To me, inquiry is always asking questions in order to get answers. I'll think to myself, "Now who could I ask about that?" I'm constantly asking questions. We try to get children to constantly ask questions and get their own answers.* – Linda Hofacker, school secretary

The inquiry process is simply a part of who people are in this school now. This shift didn't take place overnight, though; it came as a gradual shift over the course of several years. Some resisted the very notion of inquiry, holding onto the ease of simply making decisions, choosing solutions instead of clearly defining the problem in the first place, even though the inquiry process stood as the central functioning process of the cadres. Some who had an understanding of inquiry in theory struggled with it in

use. Inquiry presented many problems and strains, but the primary problem is that inquiry does not constitute an expedient way to go about dealing with important issues. Instead, inquiry requires a sometimes painstaking, complicating, and frustrating commitment over time to looking at an issue or problem with focus and detail.

> *I've been to training sessions on the inquiry process over and over, and every time I think I have it, and then I come back to school and we try to actually do it in the cadre, and it's really tough.... It seems like every problem we came up with already had an obvious answer. We thought, "We already know this." It was so tough making the part of the process where you generate a hypothesis really valuable. It seemed like a lot of busy work. I think that's what everybody felt. The two cadres that I worked with last year both felt that way.* – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

> *I'm more impulsive, so when I see a problem, I want to hurry up and fix it. And it was hard for me to realize that what you see as the problem may not be the problem, it may be a result of a deeper problem. So it took time. We had to give it more time, step back, look at it. We needed to look at the roots of what's really going on, and stop the Band-Aid approach to fixing things.* – Rhea Kirk, first-grade teacher

> *Inquiry is a hard process. There are times when I went to the cadre meetings and thought, "I don't want to do this, because it's so detailed." You just want to fix the problem.* – A North parent volunteer

Practicing Inquiry Can Be Tough-Going

Over and again, people talked repeatedly about how difficult the inquiry process is. Their comments often had to do with inquiry offering no quick fix and forcing people to look at the problems at hand, question more deeply, and come up with more questions. Jim explains how the roadblocks to inquiry stack up against the school community engaging in the inquiry process.

> *First, people have a natural inclination to just want to change things. "If there's a problem, let's fix it. Let's not piddle around with it." But you've got to fight that natural inclination. The second roadblock comes after we've decided what research we need to do, then everyone stares back at the AS coach and says, "Okay, you do the research and we'll see you back here next week." In the inquiry process, we share the research. The third roadblock is that we need to search for measurable outcomes when we attempt something new. We have to nail down indicators of success if the things we do are going to live on. We have to be able to prove to the school board that these are things we need to do. There's a natural tendency to say, "Let's just try this, but let's not think about evaluating it." Fourth, cadres need to do a better job communicating with the steering committee, and then they need to take what the cadres are doing and compare it with the vision and give critical suggestions*

back. We've started to do that but haven't done that a whole lot. Also, the steering committee is supposed to have a school, as a whole, meeting every month so we can talk about where we're going. We ended up having them every six months. The steering committee should meet every three months, and we're getting better at that, but communication is a key. Everybody needs to know what's going on every step of the way. – Jim Gay, principal

Several rough experiences with inquiry in the cadres reflect these barriers to inquiry, among others. Several examples stand out from staff's stories about using inquiry in the governance structure of the school.

The first has to do with jumping too quickly. A difficult loss to take came when the parent who pursued a certain line of research became disillusioned with the process when her ideas were not pursued by the cadre. She subsequently has not participated any further in the work of the school.

The staff was concerned about how the kids' needs were being satisfied before and after school. We thought about after-school childcare programs and breakfast programs, and everyone at the school thought that they would be super things to offer. But when we started talking to the kids and talking to the parents, we found out they didn't want these programs. And we were shocked. They just didn't have a need for these types of programs. And we just assumed from the beginning that there was a need. – Rhea Kirk, first-grade teacher

We may have worded the question wrong about after-school childcare. The question was, "Do you need after-school care for your child?" And the community answered back overwhelmingly that it didn't. But the question we probably should have asked was, "What child care does your child receive after school?" We made a big mistake not recognizing that some of our questions could best be answered by survey and some could best be answered by research. At the very beginning, a parent said, "I know somebody who does an after-school childcare program, and I could do some research and find out more about the program." This parent did a lot of research before the information came back that said the community really didn't want an after-school childcare program. So we lost that parent as part of the group. She was upset. She had gone to all this work and then it wasn't needed at all. But that was a mistake. That should not have been researched until after it was determined there was a need. – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

To the cadre's credit, while it jumped too quickly to considering solutions for a problem that did not exist, it did not just jump into a new program to satisfy the hurt feelings of one person who perceived the school as ungrateful for a contribution. Certainly, the staff learned the ropes of conducting inquiry the hard way, but it stuck with the process. There are no guarantees that folks outside the everyday life of the school, however, will be able to hold up when their feelings are hurt. This is a hard les-

son to learn, especially when the school and the program work so hard to involve parents in the first place. They hate to lose someone willing to try. The trick is to draw people back in as they see inquiry working over time, as inquiry works to address the fundamental, foundational issues of reform and change in the school.

> *Our cadre looked at the space problem. Every nook and cranny in our building is filled. We looked at room size and where things are stored. But I felt our cadre didn't do the job it needed to do. After our inquiry training last summer, I understand now that we didn't do the type of inquiry that we should have done in this group. What we did was we decided that there was a space problem and that we would build cabinets. I felt like our time could have been better spent, because to come up with a solution of building cabinets could have been an administrative directive from day one, and we wouldn't have spent all this time going through it. I don't think we asked the right questions. We kind of had in our minds what we wanted as the answer before we even started our cadre work. I think that after going through inquiry training last summer, it changed us dramatically, because now we can see that we can't have the answer before we ask the question. I think working through the inquiry process is a major part of becoming an accelerated school. And I think it's a tough part.*
> – Chuck Martin, fourth-grade teacher

The cabinets never got built and won't ever be built. No one is quite sure why. My speculation is that the whole process just didn't seem on track, so the school perceived the proposed solutions as flawed. Chuck's assessment that the school needed to see that it had to engage in the question-asking phase with more rigor and focus proves to be one of the most crucial insights for making inquiry work in this school. On several other occasions, the school used inquiry both to find that it didn't need to take action, thereby saving itself the effort and expense of an unneeded action (much like the case of not pursuing after school childcare programs, though no parents were hurt in this process), and to find productive solutions that made an important difference in the school.

Two accounts by teachers engaged in inquiry work with cadres show a range of thought and action taking place in the cadres. The first is Misty Ellis's report on the Parent Involvement Cadre's inquiry about parental participation. The second is Chuck Martin's account of the Curriculum Cadre's inquiry into fourth-grade test scores in mathematics.

The Parent Involvement Cadre

by Misty Ellis, first-grade teacher

During the 1997-98 school year, I was a member of the Parent Involvement Cadre. This cadre was composed of five staff members and five parent members. We met weekly on Monday evenings from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. Each meeting began by handing out the roles of facilitator, recorder, time keeper, and closer, and ended by setting the agenda and assigning roles for the next meeting.

The first job of our cadre was to look at the list of challenges which came from the Taking Stock Process and to choose a chailenge area on which to focus. The challenges included parental and community involvement in PTO; parent understanding of indicators of success; parent involvement in homework; and the use of community resources. Involvement in PTO was chosen as the top priority. The group defined the problem as a lack of membership in PTO (parents and staff) and a lack of communication between PTO and staff. The group hypothesized as to why this problem existed. After developing a list of hypotheses and discussing ways of testing the hypotheses for validity, we decided that a phone survey of parents would give a better understanding of why the participation in PTO meetings and related functions was lacking. A phone survey was drafted, and the group began calling parents.

The next step was to survey staff. The group then completed a summary of the survey results. The results of the surveys indicated the areas of strengths as many people having interest in being involved in PTO and busy schedules would not overwhelmingly prevent parents from attending. The challenges were identified as lack of knowledge about PTO; families were too busy; parents are unsure of expectations; a majority of parents work outside the home; many parents are unaware of child-care availability; and the majority of parents are involved in extracurricular activities.

After interpreting the results, we began brainstorming solutions. We decided to contact other Parent Teacher Organizations for more ideas. While the group brainstormed solutions, we found that many of the ideas that we came up with PTO had already tried or had plans to try. We decided that it made sense for our cadre meeting to coincide with the PTO meeting. So, the next meetings were planned together. The cadre researched some of the solutions. The PTO/Family Involvement Cadre decided to begin by making a family directory, listing our vision statement, class lists, family names and phone numbers, PTO meeting schedule, PTO officers and committee chairs, and a calendar of school events and special PTO functions. The directories were distributed to families of the school in the fall of 1998.

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While working on this challenge area, our cadre met with some struggles. The most challenging of our struggles was that we had cadre members who were very active in PTO (even PTO officers) and we had members who were not active in PTO at all (including myself). This was a struggle, because while I feel that everyone was genuinely interested in the future of our PTO, it appeared to those who were already so involved that some of us were being hypocritical. Many of the hypotheses as to why PTO was lacking involvement were taken as personal attacks on the PTO officers. It became difficult for us to make a hypothesis about why parents and staff were not attending PTO, without feeling hypocritical. This was a challenge for our group for most of the year. I think that may have been the biggest reason for our looking back and redefining the original problem to include participation in all school functions.

Another struggle that I personally have faced every year in my cadre is the desire for a quick fix. We all tend to want to immediately offer solutions to rid us of our problem before really studying the problem. This is what makes it so hard for us to follow the inquiry process. However, the inquiry process forces us to look deeper into the causes of the problem so that the changes we make are systemic.

The hope of the directory is that all members of the school will see themselves as members of the Parent Teacher Organization. By listing the schedules and events of PTO, parents and staff can plan in advance to be part of the activities. The list of committees may offer people a way to be involved in an area of their strength without feeling too committed to the *unknown*.

Since the directories have recently been printed and handed out, I am not sure at this time if our hopes have become reality!

The Curriculum Cadre

by Chuck Martin, fourth-grade teacher

The 1997-98 Curriculum Cadre consisted of four classroom teachers, one school staff member, two parents, the curriculum supervisor, and the school principal. The cadre met after school each week. The meetings were run by a facilitator who was chosen at each meeting. The cadre was given a list of possible areas on which to work. This list was generated from the staff brainstorming problems before the cadres were created. The cadre discussed these areas of concern and decided that examining the low proficiency scores in mathematics would be our focus.

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Challenge areas were hypothesized within the mathematics area. Examples included teachers not consistently using the program; our current program not correlating with the proficiency test; and not enough training for teachers. Each of these hypotheses was discussed, ways of testing were examined, and a member was enlisted to be responsible for the plan of action.

Some ways the hypotheses were tested were:

- A parent survey and teacher survey were created, distributed, and returned and the results tallied. The results were discussed.
- Two teachers visited area schools that scored well on the mathematics section of the proficiency test. They returned and reported their findings.
- Articles on mathematics, and specifically our mathematics program, were read and discussed. Our mathematics company was contacted about correlation with the proficiency test.
- Test scores and subscores from the proficiency tests were compared with those from other schools in our district.

The scope of this problem was so involved that possible solutions were never implemented. The obstacles in our way were never quite overcome. So many variables in the research, along with various personalities and philosophies within the group, limited our ability to generate solutions. Many of the cadre members became frustrated and disillusioned with the inquiry process. So much time was used with the process that no time was left for any solutions during the school year.

At the last meeting of the year, it was decided that the teachers would create and conduct Family Math Nights in the fall of 1998. I was unable to attend this meeting, and I was concerned that the cadre jumped to a solution just to say that we accomplished something. I did not feel that the research that we conducted pointed toward this solution. Teachers worked on the family nights at a workshop in June. Nothing has been mentioned this year about actually conducting the nights. The cadre is no longer together, so the mathematics problem has been dropped for now. I don't know if it will ever be picked up again. New cadres are being formed for this year and I don't know if any will be curriculum-based, or if they will continue to tackle mathematics.

I realize that a problem such as this one (the mathematics achievement, curriculum, and pedagogy) is extremely huge in its scope. I am sure that many books have been written and long-term studies have been made to determine how best to teach mathematics. We simply did not have the resources or time to explore *all* areas of this problem.

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Practicing Inquiry Pays Off

The staff can't help but make assumptions. No group can. It can, though, learn to control its tendencies to jump to conclusions based on its assumptions without the needed evidence or background knowledge to warrant the jump. This school community has learned to practice inquiry and control its urges to jump ahead. Instead of the inquiry process posing problems, as it did in earlier scrapes where people put themselves on the line and then felt unappreciated, folks are beginning to see the inquiry process as an essential part of keeping them honest, helping them look more deeply, and enhancing the programs in the school for all students and all stakeholders.

> *We did the same thing last year with fundraising that we did before with the after- and before-school programs. You always hear people criticizing or complaining about kids selling this or that for fundraising purposes. So we thought, "Well, let's find an alternative route for fundraising so we can still buy the things the parents and the kids feel we need for the school." After we got to brainstorming different ways to make money, we found out that the parents really did want to keep selling candy bars and products. We made money doing it, it took the least amount of work, and they were satisfied with it.* – Rhea Kirk, first-grade teacher

Another success, mentioned above, came when the curriculum cadre made it possible for the teaching staff to have extra planning time each month. This has paid a huge dividend with the staff and the school in terms of how the teachers feel about their planning time, and the things they can do for class and students with it. Also, they benefit from increased continuity within the curriculum and across grade levels and subject areas.

Finally, the communication cadre revealed that gaps in communication might best be served by the school publishing a more comprehensive and consistently periodic newsletter to the entire community, especially to parents.

> *One of the major things that came out of one of the surveys was that we weren't communicating enough with the community. We weren't giving folks all of the information about what's going on with the school, what's happening in terms of events, that type of thing. So that's where the weekly newsletter came from. We're still trying to come up with tools to teach the community what accelerated schools are, especially for our kindergarten parents, who come in new. We are going to try and finalize those.* – Linda Hofacker, school secretary

The school community came to see that inquiry constitutes a central component for change in the AS model, in the lives of school members, and for work in school. Now it sees being inquiry-oriented as a constant state of being. The key is not to rush to conclusions, but to study problems and issues thoroughly together. This doesn't mean that every little decision goes to committee. Sometimes people handle administrative details in the fray or decide that an issue requires the use of inquiry logic but not the use of a full-blown inquiry process (Levin, 1995).

The school took a crucial step during the last year of funding for the project and the year this study was conducted (1997-98) by *re-cycling* through the Accelerated Schools process for the second time, first by taking stock again, and then by reconstituting several of the cadres. The movement and the school recognized the importance of institutionalizing the inquiry process, making it a part of the flow and course of things as an organizational norm. The school recognized that much organizational learning had taken place, but that much needed to continue and change.

The re-cycling process played a key role in introducing new members of the staff to the Accelerated Schools idea, reconfirming the process and the decisions made at the beginning, and opening new doors to new ideas. An unanticipated set of struggles occurred with several new members of the staff to varying degrees during this process and, at other times, during the first five years of the grant and the model. Just understanding the ideas and concepts of Accelerated Schools and its unique approaches to governance, community, and teaching in early stages is difficult. The staff intervened on the new members' behalf, but only after noticing that new members of the staff were at different places in terms of knowledge and experience with the model. This is an important finding for future professional development with new members and ongoing work with veterans of the process.

> *Accelerated Schools sounded exciting during my short interview for the job, but the staff could only tell me a little bit about it. And I had no idea what is was really about. Then I came to the cadre meetings my first year, and I was so confused I had no idea what was going on. The cadres were doing inquiry, and I didn't understand. I could see the problem and thought, "Well, this is how we can fix it." I thought we were wasting so much time, going in circles. And then, they sent me to an inquiry workshop and they sent me to coach's training. Then it was like a light bulb coming on, and I understood what was happening around me. As a result, I found out that inquiry was much more thorough and not a quick fix. I think sometimes we want to jump to those quick fixes, which make us happy for the moment, but then later we might find out that the problem really still exists and maybe what we thought was causing the problem really wasn't either a cause or the entire cause at all. And by doing the inquiry, I think, we get a lot more input from a lot of different people, and we are also able to study what's causing the problem before we try to fix it.* – Misty Ellis, first-grade teacher

On a wider scale, the school examined structural, operational matters that had an indirect influence on the classroom — for example, the changes in communication, the search for space, and the creation of extra curriculum planning time for teachers chronicled here. The staff gained confidence with the inquiry process and had successes using the process on these matters. I also count as successful those inquiries that led seemingly nowhere, because they illuminated issues and possible avenues for practice (valuable takeaways in their own right), and those decisions *not* to do something, which can have a powerful, positive impact in a school setting.

As a result of these experiences with cadre work, the school began moving toward some of the harder questions for classrooms, shifting from mostly safe topics to more troubling ones confronting them; an example is the curriculum cadre examining somewhat unsuccessfully the one-year dip in the fourth-grade test scores in mathematics. Their beginning inquiries in these areas show the evolution of the model and the school's work taking shape. This doesn't mean that the learning curve of the organization and individuals will be anything less than steep or that seeming successes will follow at every turn. There will be losses along the way. What it does show is the school's willingness to use the model as a part of its regular, valued mode of operating, to forge ahead, to question deeply, to learn together, to stay focused on children, and to continually challenge its assumptions about what makes for a great elementary school education.

This vignette of the curriculum cadre's inquiry into the dip in test mathematics scores suggests the care with which all schools should address the topic of proficiency tests. While there are no easy answers to the problem of a dip in high-stakes test scores in one academic area among one group (it's very debatable whether any action taken would have any controllable effect on a future group in this context at all anyway!), the inquiry process allowed the school to examine the problem deeply, and it helped the group avoid the typical knee-jerk reaction we often employ when faced with a seeming negative phenomenon like this. It would have been easy to blame the new mathematics program and yank it, or to impose new methods that focus on drills that would do more harm than good (Stigler & Hiebert, 1998). It is appropriate and sound practice for the school to take no action on this problem; only time will tell. And the inquiry process as a way of working in this scene makes it likely that the problem can be re-addressed if problems in this area persist.

At any rate, folks in the school can't imagine others making decisions for them and having no say themselves.

> *Inquiry, now that I understand it, is a major component, because a lot of times people have great ideas about how to make schools better places. But so many of them are quick fixes — great ideas this year but they fade away the next — whereas if the ideas are researched and more people are involved, the people will want to continue supporting a good idea.* – Misty Ellis, first-grade teacher

Of course, beyond the value of the inquiry process for helping make the school more effective in meeting the needs of students and the community lies the possibility that inquiry will change classrooms, teaching, and learning. The inquiry process changes how we think about what we do and what we actually do, ultimately reflecting a deep set of commitments to democratic processes, shared decision making, collaboration, and integration across the entire school setting.

Translating Inquiry from Its Use in School Governance to the Classroom

Moving from the use of inquiry in school governance to the use of inquiry as a pedagogical approach in the classroom constitutes an expectation in the AS movement. Ideally, inquiry should be used simultaneously in both domains. Inquiry has the potential for transforming teaching and learning, classrooms, and school culture. Yet, I know of no one who truly believes that using an inquiry-oriented approach exclusively for teaching and learning could exist in today's schools with all of the competing concerns surrounding state mandates for high-stakes proficiency testing, for instance. Instead, in this scene, the hope is that a focus on inquiry can transform the classrooms into interesting, challenging, student-centered, knowledge-producing, and empowering environments, and meet the intellectual and achievement needs of students, families, and communities in some balance with more traditional, teacher-directed, information-oriented curriculum and teaching.

As Levin suggests, teachers not only use inquiry as a pedagogical approach in the school and in classrooms but they also use it to examine their decisions and ideas for teaching. Ideally, the inquiry process would serve as a primary lens through which to consider decisions on curriculum and pedagogy. Further, the inquiry process would become the filter through which the curriculum of the school is screened. Staff and students might ask, "How can we use the inquiry process to better teach and learn this issue or topic?"

In this case, an inquiry-orientation to classroom life pervades the scene. I have given several examples of powerful learning emerging from classrooms and cadres. In this school, the contexts for learning, both classrooms and cadres, are blended together. For instance, the power kids' cadre extended their ideas from their cadre work to the classroom so that their learning became integrated and transdisciplinary (Beane, 1997; Drake, 1993), They did this by building a land laboratory, for which they found a need and raised the money, and which they then designed and ultimately planted; and they also produced a webpage on county history based on their interactions with their new adoptive grandparents at Heartland Manor. There are many more examples of inquiry in use in classrooms to different degrees and of different sorts.

No one would dispute that inquiry is the central process of cadre work and school governance. Though the school has struggled with how inquiry will play out in the cadres as outlined above, it has had an even tougher time with the translation of inquiry into the classroom as a systematic, universal tool. The staff has identified several problems with using inquiry that constitute substantive barriers to its use.

First, using the inquiry process correctly by following the steps and pursuing the interesting avenues that emerge for further study with students takes lots of time. This fact makes using inquiry in the classroom problematic when so many other competing concerns exist, including covering the curriculum that has emerged out of collaborative planning with students and colleagues. The school has concerns about

students having a grounding in the basics so that they can do well on the proficiency tests. This is a political reality that cannot be ignored. It makes little difference in this culture that the school is accelerated if the students' test scores drop. Right or wrong, the staff bears a responsibility for preparing students for basic success on a standardized test, and, as a result, this limits what they feel they can do with the inquiry process.

Second, the faculty uses progressive, hands-on, inquiry-oriented activities for powerful learning in which students participate in extensive, knowledge-generating, problem-solving activities, but not specifically through the structured, formal inquiry process as outlined above. In fact, Jim and the staff have interpreted inquiry for classroom use much more broadly than they have for school governance.

Third, the staff wonders whether all levels of students can engage meaningfully in the inquiry process. They believe all students can learn and that they can make a meaningful contribution to an inquiry process at any perceived ability level in the student body. Their reservations come not when considering if kids can learn this way, but more so with regard to the issues surrounding the developmental appropriateness of inquiry with younger children. At what age can students conduct inquiry effectively? Do they have the academic and intellectual skills to learn all that they need to learn in school by engaging in the inquiry process with each other and with their teachers in kindergarten, first and second grades? Or is inquiry something that older students should do? (See examples of inquiry in action in *"Change Snapshot 4: Examples of Best Practice"* in this chapter.)

> Tom: *Please define how the school is moving towards the use of inquiry in the classroom.*
>
> Jim (Gay, principal): *I think that is the area we have struggled with the most. We have different definitions of what inquiry is. If you talk about discovery learning, we are doing that. If you talk about the use of the AS notion of the inquiry process, we struggle with that, particularly at the younger grade levels. We use the inquiry process in the third and fourth grades, but we have some difficulty with how AS would use inquiry with the kindergarten. I think we are skilled in discovery learning and the use of inquiry in general at all grade levels. But there's no way we can do the inquiry process one hundred percent of the time.*
>
> Tom: *How does inquiry look in the classroom?*
>
> Jim: *Kids might be studying a topic in science, and as a group they want to study a certain topic within the unit. They actually would do what we would do in the adult cadres. They would study the problem, define the problem, and then talk about how they can get it researched and actually do the research. [Then they would] bring the research back to the group, and synthesize what they bring back, and develop a possible solution from it. And we do that to some extent, particularly in the older grades. If you try to do a full-blown inquiry in kindergarten, good luck. It's difficult to do anyway, and the kindergarten kids will be off*

the wall. I don't know that they're ready to handle it yet. But one of the nice things about the AS model is that you have some flexibility in terms of how you interpret things. We interpret powerful learning a little more broadly. Powerful learning is the kind of learning that your kids will remember for a long time. It makes them love learning, and it can be found in some of the dramatic things that we're doing like Pioneer Day. We don't dwell too much on inquiry, although we think we're doing more and more of it. We try to create classroom units and lessons that are really engaging for kids. I guess to answer you a little better, we're concerned with inquiry, and we think about it from time to time, and we do look back at it, but we don't let it stop us from doing what we think we need to do with kids.

Two Pictures of the Swinging Door of School Transformation

When I think about the transformation of a school's culture, I think North has been transformed. The school has a clear vision — a democratic means for everyone to participate in decision making — and experience/skill in working through mistakes, and implementing excellent solutions with/for students and parents. All students are valued and cared for regardless of their perceived ability levels; each student is included and challenged by the curriculum, which is focused on creating powerful learning experiences. The entire community is involved in the life of the school. People know what is going on in the school, are welcomed in, and participate. The professional and social atmosphere is different now: it's a healthy environment where staff, students, and community members can try something new, make a request, and take risks and not be criticized. Learning extends beyond the four walls of the classroom and the corridors of the school building and into the community. The swinging door of school transformation has swung open, and the school community has stepped through it.

At this stage in the research process, however, the topic of inquiry in the classroom concerns me more than any other and offers the school's greatest challenge. The swinging door of school transformation continues to beckon the staff to step through, but it swings shut when they hesitate or refuse to step at all. It does not stop swinging when things change for the better in several areas, as it has in governance and in teaching. In fact, some staff members have chosen to step through the door completely with regard to changing the way they teach, the way their classroom looks and feels, the way they perceive that students learn best, and how they engage students in learning.

The AS model requires a fundamental shift toward powerful learning which involves the use of the inquiry process. The problem is that anyone can walk through the school and see inquiry going on, as outlined above and in countless new ways on a daily basis, *and* in the next moment see students doing worksheets on isolated skills at the teacher's direction. How is this possible? Can we say that the school has been transformed at all if this observation is still possible? Or is there a degree to which the school has been transformed, and teaching and learning are still evolving, changing gradually as a result of the model and of the inquiry process being used in cadres?

At this point I need to say to the reader, especially those in the school community at North, that these paragraphs are not criticisms of the school or of the people who work and go to school there. How can I say that teachers with 20 or 30 years of experience teaching elementary students are wrong? Or those with only one or two years? I don't have any experience teaching elementary school, and I'm merely a bystander in the long course of the life of this school anyway. I haven't taken the school on this five-year journey (and longer!) and sensed the enormity of change in governance, atmosphere, and classrooms first-hand. I have only been on the scene for a year, so I have no grounds to criticize, even if I thought I were right. Instead, I believe I am making an honest observation with which most would agree: That is, that while teaching and learning have been affected by the AS model and the inquiry process, in almost all cases in a positive way (I am hard-pressed to come up with a negative in this regard), teachers have still been able to remain largely unaffected, if they so choose and they sometimes do, when it comes to really changing how they view teaching, learning, students, the nature of knowledge and its production.

I understand that the process of becoming accelerated is complicated and evolutionary. It is an individual process as well as a communal one. On the one hand, the school has been able to completely reconstitute how it goes about making important decisions and transforming its community culture. On the other hand, we have to be honest about the great power that teachers hold for continuing to do their best work behind closed doors, possibly remaining free, by their choice, from engaging their students in inquiry in this case. So how does the community decide to rethink and reshape teaching and learning, altogether? Who is responsible for shepherding and evaluating the change? Does everyone have to change, or does the very model itself leave the decision to change open to the community and to individuals? Is there any benefit to forcing people to change? Is there room for more than one approach? Will change gradually continue with the right amount of coaching and professional development, both for the teachers and for the school community in cadre work? Do these questions themselves signal that something remarkable is happening and continuing to happen here, or that we should be concerned that the story is incomplete?

Kerry hit on the core of the issue early in the study.

> *Maybe something that is depressing to all of us is the observation that although there are great things happening at this school, there may have been very little change in the instructional practices of some teachers. Another question is, "Should we be expecting major changes in instruction anyway, especially if we are empowering teachers and building their confidence to believe that what they are doing is powerful?" Maybe the atmosphere and the governance of the school are where we see the major changes. There are many influences, such as proficiency, a call for "back to basics," et cetera, that play a big role in the beliefs and practices of all teachers.* – Kerry Elifritz (electronic-mail reflection)

Certainly, the story is incomplete when it comes to the issue of inquiry in the classroom. We should take another picture in a few years and see how it compares with this one.

Change Snapshot 2: Principal Leadership

The whole way of viewing leadership in the school changed dramatically over the course of the five-year Venture Capital grant for instituting the AS model. Now, all school community members think of themselves and their ideas as constituting a primary consideration in the decision-making process. Leadership comes by way of committee, in groups now, and not just by way of a lone administrator. This doesn't mean, however, that the principal's role in the scene is diminished; instead, it is enhanced and becomes even more important than before. There are still administrative details to attend to, reports to file, mandatory supervisory functions to fulfill, and important decisions to make. Sometimes the decisions are tough ones, too, the kind committees won't touch. The principal still bears much responsibility as a decision maker.

But the role of principal leadership has truly shifted, and Jim Gay masterfully shifted, adapted, and shaped the roles of principal and AS coach in this school so that he could be not only effective but also reflective, empowering, humane, ethical, and moral in his leadership. Power and authority for all increased because Jim gave power and authority away without sacrificing his own. Leadership is a crucial aspect of school reform and no less a factor in this scene. In this change snapshot, I portray Jim's success as emerging from four commitments he made as a leader: (1) to emitting personality, (2) to sharing decision making with groups and individuals, (3) to participating in the processes of the school, and (4) to connecting with the community and the boardroom.

Personality Plus

Jim is smart, funny, and friendly, as well as kind, caring, and positive. No doubt about it, these qualities emerged on the first meeting and played out over time. They can't be missed, and the school community felt these qualities, among others, in their everyday interactions with Jim over a very productive and good six years (1992-98). Being personable, a good communicator, and clear about his central convictions helped carry Jim and the model. His qualities and approach to people and processes in humane and thoughtful ways separate Jim from so-called leaders who are merely technicians, those who can tend to the mechanical parts of the job but miss the emotional, social, ethical, moral, and humane parts of principal leadership. These commitments make the endeavor of principal leadership more the fulfillment of a calling than of a job description, and teaching, learning and school life become more than a mere function of society but a moral enterprise of communities (Sergiovanni, 1991).

Jim is so positive. Whether something is going wonderfully well and he's so positive, or if something isn't going so well — he's still positive. He'll pick you up and say, "Well, that's all right. We'll work on it." He's that way with everyone. I remember the first two years, every morning Jim would bop his head in the door and say, "Good morning, kids. Good morning, Mr. Martin." He'd say hello to every class. Bus drivers — he'd greet everybody. He does that as much as he can now, but the school district has given him more leg work to do than before. I like being with Jim. The principal is the school leader, really. He or she sets the atmosphere for the building. And Jim is very supportive of teachers. He's very kind to the children. Of course, he's the principal, so occasionally he has to discipline them, but he's still very kind to them. On cold days, I remember, he'd come up to the room and say, "Kids, it's pretty cold isn't it? Well, come downstairs, I've got some hot chocolate for you." He's nice. And now if we need materials for teaching, we can say, "Jim, I think this would really help with teaching," and he will try to find a way to get it. – David Martin, third-grade teacher

I think Jim is a wonderful person to work for. He's supportive. He can criticize in a nice way. I always feel that if I have a problem,... I can come and talk to Jim about it. I have not always felt that way about administrators. This is the first time that I have felt that I could come to somebody with a problem. – Amy Dawson, fourth-grade teacher

Sharing Decision Making with Groups and Individuals

The difference now is that teachers are freer to voice their opinions, they're not afraid to do that, and they're not afraid to take risks to try something new. They might come up to Jim and say, "You know, I would like to try this." And they know that he would support them. I think the atmosphere is very different; everyone has a voice in decision making. The support staff feels more a part of the decision-making process. The collegiality, the safe feeling of being able to take risks — and also I think people really feel like Jim cares about their personal lives — that if things are going on, he'll work with them and try to make this a real pleasant place to work. I think everybody feels that way. – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

The principal gives us the power to make decisions. He goes to bat for us if we make a decision and it costs something. He'll go look for the money. I just think that he supports us 100 percent. He really wants to see this work. If your cadre decided to do something, he would go for whatever it needed. If the cadre needed something from the school board, Jim would go the board and get it. He went to the board and asked for the day for us to go to the conference in St. Louis. – Chuck Martin, fourth-grade teacher

By virtue of his position as principal, Jim could make or reverse lots of decisions that come out of the cadres. But he doesn't. Instead, he works with them and supports their work. He sometimes supports decisions when he himself doesn't agree. This is the mark of effective, participatory leadership.

If a cadre makes a decision, he doesn't say, "Oh, that's a stupid decision. Get out of here." He'll say, "The cadre made its decision; let's try it." – Chuck Martin, fourth-grade teacher

The difficult part of the work has to do with continuing to build and shape the overall program while so many competing ideas and personalities are involved. And while the school is small, with only about 20 total staff members, the need for open communication and constant discourse, negotiation, and attention govern Jim's work.

The way the governance process is structured is that all along the line there are checks and balances. If something comes up that you can't live with as principal, you stop and you talk about it. Now, that doesn't mean you just table things that might be good because someone is saying, "I don't want to do that." But it does mean that you sit down and talk about it, and then we talk about our vision and why we're here. "What specific things are you concerned about? How might we address them?" And then we're able to work through those things, because I think we trust each other. – Jim Gay, principal

Supporting the structures of the model and engaging the staff and community in the process of making the model work are central commitments in Jim's principalship. His support of groups' and individuals' ideas marks effectiveness in this area of work, as does his moral commitment to enhancing and transforming the life of the school community.

I attribute some of the changes to the principal. He believed in the model's philosophies and goals from the beginning, to see that every child is seen as gifted and that we teach to every child instead of expecting them to adjust to what we're doing. Plus, Jim believes in empowering people and transforming people into leaders, and that's a big change: to make people feel like they do know something and they can build on what they know and improve on what they do. I think that a principal needs to agree with the AS model. That is a very important piece of the puzzle. I think there are schools that have tried to become accelerated without the principal being behind it completely. – Kerry Elifritz, AS coach

Participating in Processes

Jim is committed to the time and the energy it takes to make AS work. He'll give his time just like the teachers. – Chuck Martin, fourth-grade teacher

Jim participates in the life of the school. Without micromanaging or making people feel as though he is just looking over their shoulders, Jim has established himself as principal and as colleague with the staff and community. His greatest commitment comes through his involvement in the life of the school on a day-to-day basis. He participates in classes and events of the day. He knows what's going on in the building. He makes sure that he attends nearly all of the cadres, not to control them, but to participate

and to stay informed. He makes at least the same commitment of time and energy to all the after-school meetings, the cadres, and special events that the staff makes. He believes that requiring a commitment from staff and community to support what it takes in terms of action to make the model work also requires that he demand the same or more from himself.

> *I think one of Jim's best qualities is his willingness to do what needs to be done.*
> – Chuck Martin, fourth-grade teacher

The most impressive part of Jim's work, to me, came in his work with students, staff, and parents in the course of the regular day. He is committed each day to taking a turn monitoring lunch in the cafeteria. This gives Linda, the school secretary, a chance to take lunch. Even more than his general presence in the school, Jim takes a specific role in covering teachers when they need to be out.

> *One of the things that makes Jim such a good school leader is his involvement in the school at the classroom level. I think that's relatively rare for a principal today. I think he makes time for that. He and Kerry sometimes cover classes so the school doesn't have to get a substitute. He teaches one of the family groups and helps with the planning. He helps with teaching just like any other member of the staff. This commitment comes at some expense. Jim sometimes doesn't get his principal paperwork finished on time. He has lots on his plate with the school, the AS model, [and] serving as special education coordinator for the whole district. He is tied to work outside the school and the paperwork stacks up. But he makes no apologies for not getting all of that done on time. He puts that in its place. He doesn't want to sacrifice quality in the school and his presence in the school to paperwork. He doesn't think it's worth it, and he doesn't think paperwork defines the principalship. I think this is a very valuable viewpoint. It's one of the things that makes him such a strong leader in the school. And, by the way, the paperwork always gets done.* – Tom Poetter (observation notes)

Connecting with the Community and the Boardroom

Jim has been extremely skillful, purposeful, and successful in building connections between North and the school community. The major factor for the school's success with the community lies in the commitment to welcoming volunteers into the school. Jim's early commitment to building the volunteer program and allowing members of the local church's missionary society to volunteer their time and come into the school to work with staff and children set the tone for all of the wonderful opportunities and experiences for community connections that followed in the five years of the grant. He makes a concerted effort to greet friends and families when they come to the school, to visit or to help. His efforts in making the school a welcoming and open place have been central to the school's growth in terms of community connections.

There are countless examples of connecting the school with the community — such as the family groups' connections with Heartland Manor, annual programs conducted in association with the church volunteer groups, countless contributions by local residents to special programs, and the computer loan program, where families received recycled Apple computers and software for use at home. The program has blossomed, in part, as a result of these connections.

Jim has also built lasting and valuable relationships with administrators in the district, from the superintendent to other school principals, who generally support North and the AS model. It isn't hard to imagine other colleagues seeing the opportunities that Jim and the school have as a result of the Venture Capital grant, and seeing the publicity in the media about the success of the program and resenting it to a certain degree. But this hasn't happened. Jim is a team player, interested in the overall success of the district, actively involved through his coordination of special education with the lives and work of students and staff all over the district. He is connected. He is respected. This is attributable to Jim's personality, his personal commitment to people and programs, and the resulting transformation of North, which is lost on no one who has paid any attention at all.

> *As far as our ability to work together, we talk everyday. We try to keep each other up on what is going on. Jim is very open, and he's easy to work with. I found him easy to build rapport with, and I was very willing to try some of the things he wanted to try. I picked up a lot of his things, and I think he's picked up a few of my things, too.* – Rick Hacker, South Elementary School principal

Jim has also maintained a good relationship with the superintendent and the school board. Every indication is that the school district is proud of the North program and its successes. The school has brought a mountain of positive publicity to the district as a result of the numerous features that have been written about North in local and regional papers over the years. For a long time, Jim has known that showing the board results would be an important step in helping to institutionalize the AS program at North beyond the Venture Capital funding. At present, he is busy building support in the district and the board to continue funding the professional development and materials necessary to keep the AS model going at North beyond the funding cycle and beyond his own tenure as principal. This will be an important factor in the continuing work of the school, students, and staff in becoming accelerated.

Change Snapshot 3: The Role of the AS Coach

Another crucial consideration for understanding the transformation of the school culture and schooling at North lies in the coach's position in the AS framework and how it functioned in the first five years of the model's use at North. While Jim and Kerry were both trained as coaches at the beginning, Kerry bore most of the responsibility for the early stages of adoption and implementation of the AS model. Her reflections on her work help us understand what happened at the school and how the AS coach's role has a bearing on the development of an accelerated school. Her reflections follow.

The Role of the Accelerated Schools Coach

by Kerry Elifritz, AS Coach

The Accelerated Schools Newsletter from spring 1995 described the AS coach as:

- having a deep commitment to creating schools that facilitate the development of all dimensions of every child
- having experience with and knowledge of school culture
- having a true sense of enjoyment of being at the school site
- having strong communication and interpersonal skills
- using creative training strategies
- being an active listener
- being a reflective questioner
- being an effective facilitator
- being motivational, someone who can energize and encourage people
- being a "big picture" person
- being a team player
- being flexible
- being comfortable with change, ambiguity, and conflict

The article describes the role of AS coach as coaching the team, but not playing the game. The role is to be supportive and help the school community to make decisions for itself. I soon found out how difficult this last responsibility was.

The role of the coach should change as the Accelerated Schools process develops. At the beginning, the coach is a trainer, demonstrating the process and guiding the school community through the proper steps. This also involved inspiring those outside the staff to become an important part of the process, making them feel wanted and encouraging all ideas to be shared. An important shift which needs to take place as soon as possible is for the coach to fade behind the scenes. This was an important lesson for all of us to learn.

The longer I stayed at the forefront of the process, the more the process was seen as my program. Many involved either lost interest in trying to follow or were content to allow me to continue as facilitator. In my desire to make things easier for the staff, I was actually depriving them of the opportunity to develop the ownership that was needed to face the bumps in the

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road. I felt it was up to me to keep everything going smoothly, going ahead, and planning things without consulting the group. I think by the second year of implementation, instead of being seen as supportive, I was perceived as someone who was part of an elite group who just kept coming up with more things for the staff to do. By the third year, I knew that I needed to pull back and allow the school community to sink or swim on its own.

I had kept the role of trainer for too long, and it was time to hand over the reins of control. I quickly found that was easier said than done. I was torn between not wanting the responsibility anymore and feeling left out when I was not asked for advice or participation. It seemed I wasn't able to go back to being a regular member of the staff, although I said that was what I wanted. I wondered if other coaches experienced the same feelings that I was having.

I began to see that this was the problem with making a member of a school's own staff the AS coach. It was the perfect solution at first, because the staff was so eager to support the program. As the newness wore off, an outside coach would have been able to become less visible, forcing the staff to become more independent. Instead, I was there as a highly visible facilitator, feeling a self-imposed responsibility to keep the process going and successful. I was quick to take care of things myself instead of empowering the school community to accept responsibility.

One of the boundaries that I believe I set up for myself from the beginning was that I was *not* qualified to be a classroom consultant concerning powerful learning. I was in my third year of teaching, and I was working with an experienced staff. This is why having the principal as a co-coach was so important. The areas where I lacked the expertise were easily filled in by the principal. Together we were able to meet the requirements of the Accelerated Schools process, with the development of powerful learning in the classroom being his area of concern.

The rewards of being an AS coach are many. Meeting new people, developing public-speaking skills, and learning how to interact with all types of people have given me advantages that I will be able to build on for the rest of my life. Since I am only in my sixth year in education, I think I am very fortunate to have had this experience to build on, and hopefully I will be able to be a much stronger asset to the educational community for the rest of my career.

A Short Reflection on Kerry's Story

I believe Kerry provides an extremely accurate view of the coach's role and the problems she experienced. After all, it's her story and I wanted her to tell it. However, I feel she is far too self-deprecating, and I wish to provide some balance. She would never give herself her full due, so I will.

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Kerry's contributions to the success of the AS model are monumental. She did almost all of the educational pieces associated with teaching the staff what the AS model is and what it might look like in the school. She organized and planned innumerable important events in the first years of the project. She pushed the agenda when others would have let it drag. She organized and coached the cadres. She skillfully — though with much heartache — negotiated tenuous relationships with people who criticized her work or the AS model. This makes for tough-going, and we could wish for her to let go of petty criticisms and complaints that accompanied her work in the early years, but this is impossible to do. I can't do it in my work, either. She found herself in the middle of a whirlwind of feelings, reactions and ideas she couldn't control, but she kept working and advanced the model. This type of commitment, while heroic, always comes at some expense.

Out of her fire has come a more healthy application of the model. To her credit, Kerry was able to step back and realize that she was just too close to take the next steps in shepherding the model. So when the staff volunteered to take some of the weight off her, she allowed this to happen, and it has transformed the personal and institutional dynamics of the scene. She has had the opportunity to reflect as she has stepped back from her role as coach. This contribution, among others, leaves us with much to ponder and consider regarding leadership and school improvement.

Change Snapshot 4: Examples of Best Practice

Several vignettes stand out as examples of how the school community is becoming accelerated, using inquiry, and increasing the presence and impact of powerful learning opportunities for students.

Sink/Float

Rhea Quirk's first graders were learning the scientific method, of inquiry — data, observe, predict, question, hypothesis. She had written these five words on a large piece of butcher paper and posted it on an easel. The students gathered around, with me among them, soaking up re-definitions of these words, definitions they generated themselves. *Hypothesis* is a tough word, for me or for any first grader. Ms. Kirk asked the group, "What's a hypothesis?" One eager girl called out quickly, "It's an animal!" Others thought so, too, thinking of course of one of their favorites, the hippopotamus. But several students knew that wasn't quite right, and quickly offered another definition. I kind of liked the first one best.

Ms. Kirk quickly explained that the students would be using these words in an experiment. Each of them would be working with three other students to predict whether or not items placed in a tub of water would sink or float and then chart the actual results of the test. She asked the group to come up with some rules they thought would be helpful in dealing with the materials they would need for the experiment, especially the big buckets of water.

"We shouldn't splash it!" they generally agreed. And Ms. Kirk agreed as well; during the experiment she only had to prompt the students once to stop moving the buckets around on the tables so much. They weren't so much splashing as sloshing. This is to be expected among scientists, though, at least the ones I know.

"Everyone has to help with the experiment," Ms. Kirk reminded, as the students excitedly prepared their work spaces for the experiment. "One person shouldn't do all of the dumping. Everyone should get to put something in the bucket."

The students dove into the experiment, placing items from their materials bags one by one into the bucket, watching carefully to see whether they would sink or float. Ms. Kirk gently prompted them not to forget an important step as she walked around from group to group. "Make sure you make predictions before placing the item in the water. Will it sink or will it float?" The students stepped back, slowed down, and talked about the items, though still very excitedly.

A record keeper in each group had been plotting the results of the experiments. I landed with one particular group for several minutes at this point. The recorder, Ralph, asked me, "How would you write this down?" I gave a few suggestions, struggling myself with the best way to portray the results on paper. I suggested that Ralph write each item in a column along the margin and then put a check mark under one of the headings of float and sink. It looked like this in my head.

	Float	Sink
cork	X	

Before I had finished talking, Ralph quickly began to write, and I watched him produce a different chart. His depiction was much better than the one I suggested.

Float	Sink
straw	magnet
cork	

Ralph's chart was clear, functional, readable. I complimented him on his work. He seemed pleased, smiling big; he then sat as closely as he could to me when the group met to debrief with Ms. Kirk. Ms. Kirk and Ralph made me feel like a scientist.

Right to Read Week: Focus on Japan

Lots of students in elementary and secondary schools all over the country engage in focused reading weeks each spring called Right to Read Week. North takes the week very seriously, each year focusing all of its reading and learning on a single theme. This year the school chose Japan as its focus. The whole school immersed itself in things Japanese — people, literature, foods, art, language. The walls were

decorated with student art having Japanese forms and themes, and the hallways were filled with tables for activities. I visited on a planning day the teachers were using to prepare for the upcoming week.

I spent some time with the fourth-grade team, Amy and Chuck, during the planning day. All the activities they were planning really pushed the students past the realm of literature and into cultural immersion. They planned for students to make origami figures and had been getting lots of help from parentsin doing the cutting. They would make their own geographically accurate relief maps and read a lot about Japan. David Martin, third-grade teacher, invited a local businessperson to come and tell the third graders about life in Japan. You can sense the excitement that people have for the unit. The teachers are learners, too, as they create curriculum and teach. They engage in intellectual activities as they seek new ways of transmitting and drawing out knowledge from their students.

Chuck and Amy really have a feel for a progressive curriculum and how to implement one. They focus on drawing information and knowledge out of students, engaging them in inquiry. Throughout the year, they plan powerful learning events, field trips, days like Pioneer Day and the Hawaii trip, where students plan a trip to Hawaii and then actually take the trip on a plane they build in the auditorium. Students perform and exhibit what they are learning and what they know.

Here is a copy of their Inquiry Web, a planning device that I shared with them during a professional-development meeting. The format helps teachers show the use of different aspects of inquiry for a unit or lesson plan.

Name: Amy Dawson/Chuck Martin

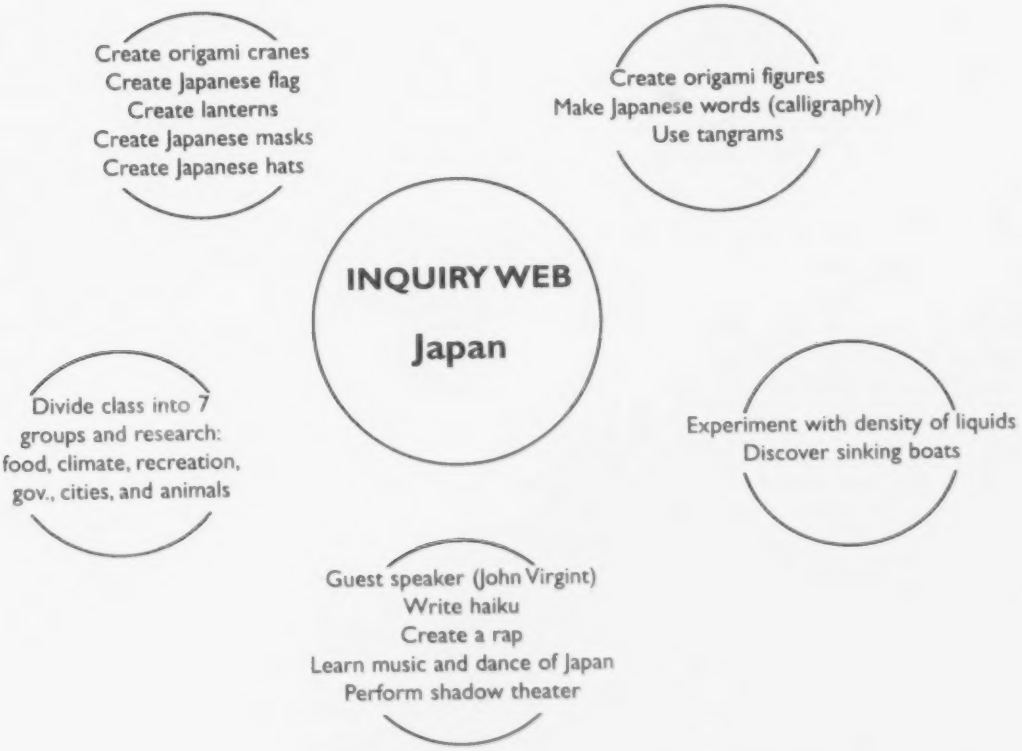
Please identify one of your upcoming activities, lessons and/or units that is (or could be) inquiry oriented:

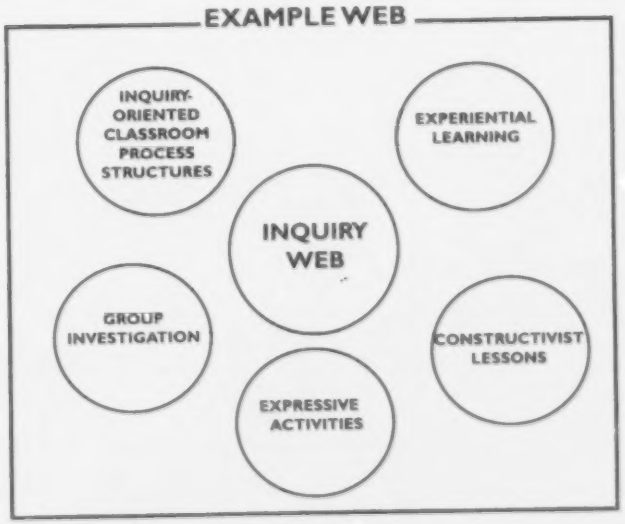
Right to Read Activities: Japan

Describe how the activity, lesson and/or unit fits into the one or more of the inquiry strands that were shared today! (Extend this reflective activity by creating a new inquiry web for the topic you identified!)

We want to use this activity to concentrate on the experiential strand as well as the group investigation strand. We want students to explore Japan! We will be experiencing Japanese writing, music and dance, the art of origami and shadow theater.

We will be investigating Japan as a country through research and group investigations. The creation of the flag, lanterns, paper cranes, Japanese masks and hats will provide opportunities to explore the country.


Create origami cranes
Create Japanese flag
Create lanterns
Create Japanese masks
Create Japanese hats
Create origami figures
Make Japanese words (calligraphy)
Use tangrams
INQUIRY WEB
Japan
Divide class into 7 groups and research: food, climate, recreation, gov., cities, and animals
Experiment with density of liquids
Discover sinking boats
Guest speaker (John Virgint)
Write haiku
Create a rap
Learn music and dance of Japan
Perform shadow theater


EXAMPLE WEB
INQUIRY-ORIENTED CLASSROOM PROCESS STRUCTURES
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
INQUIRY WEB
GROUP INVESTIGATION
CONSTRUCTIVIST LESSONS
EXPRESSIVE ACTIVITIES

My Chance to Teach: A Family Lesson

Date: Mon, 17 Nov 1997 13:59:45 -0400 (EDT)
From: Linda Hofacker
Subject: VISIT/FAMILY MEETING
To: POETTETS@muohio.edu
Cc: MENORTH@MDECA.OHIO.GOV

Hi, Tom,

I have a favor to ask — Jim will be out of the building on Wednesday morning and asked if you would feel comfortable assisting in a Family Meeting at 9:00 a.m. I will attempt to describe the lesson plan below:

1. *Review Responsibility & Unity of Purpose*
2. *Brainstorm and list strengths of people*
   (famous people to people here in our building)

   Example: *Michael Jordan — Basketball Shots*
   Mrs. Hill — Stenciling & Painting
   Mrs. Everett — Cooking
   Mrs. Worthington — Good Reader

   Discuss why it is important to build on those strengths in order to make our school the best place it can be. For example, could Miss Ellis cook for the whole school? (NO WAY!!)
3. *The children will complete strength booklets — completing? Like "The important thing about me is that I'm ..., I'm good at..., I can..., I like to..., But the important thing about me is that I'm ..."*
4. *Next they will color and cut out a prepared "person" — you will staple the booklet to the person they colored.*
5. *Wrap up the meeting[by] having each person share one of their strengths.*

Your partner is Bob Stevens, our custodian.

If you feel uncomfortable with this, we could meet as two families up in the library — let me know what you think?

Or better still, tell me I'm crazy for asking and I'll agree and the family can come meet with my family! Let me know what you think!

To: *Linda Hofacker <MENORTH@MDECA.OHIO.GOV>*

From: *Tom Poetter <poettets@muohio.edu>*

Subject: *Re: VISIT/FAMILY MEETING*

Linda, I'd be glad to help. Just give me some more details Wednesday morning. Someone has to be prepared to go in my place if I'm late. I don't intend to be, but you never know what can happen between here and Fletcher. Count me in and tell whomever I'm to meet with that I'll be there (including Bob). Great to hear from you. I'm glad to contribute, help. Thanks. Tom.

Needless to say, I jumped at the chance to teach the family lesson. I don't know how well it went, but I do know that inviting me showed several things: how willing the school is to open their community to friends, including allowing friends to teach; how talented the students and staff are — everyone did such a nice job during the time we spent together; and how patient the staff is, since it took me longer to help the students complete their assignment and get back to class than any other group.

Like the other family group meetings throughout the year, this one built upon an aspect of the three principles of the AS movement. The students connect their perceptions of school experience with the wider ideas of the model. The ultimate goals of the family meetings are to connect students across grade levels, to extend the notion of learning in the school outside the classroom and into the community (the Heartland relationship emerged from the family lessons), and to involve everyone in the school community in teaching and learning. These goals are met, which enhances learning in the school and creates a whole new realm of meaning and transformation for the school's life in the community.

Closing the Album, Resting

It's hard sometimes to close the book on a case. I could say much more here, show lots more pictures of the journey. But it's time to take stock of what has been said here, what it means for understanding school change and the transformation of a learning community. In Chapter five, I attempt to provide a summary and concluding perspectives on this case in terms of what it can teach us about change. I do this by laying out 10 significant mile markers to consider, most of which emerge from the case. Come along for this last leg of the journey, my attempt at bringing us home.

Chapter Five

Considerations for Future Travelers: Looking Back at Our Trip

It's time to close this look at the trip that Miami East North Elementary School took with the aid of the Accelerated Schools model and the funding it received to implement the model from the first wave of Venture Capital Grants given by the state of Ohio in 1992. Though a final chapter like this may give the reader the sense that the story is over, it's not. The school continues its quest to become accelerated past the funding cycle of Venture Capital. Every day it challenges itself to do what's best and right for students in the school and for people in the community. The changes that have occurred continue to have an impact on the school; they continue to expand, shift, and evolve as people engage in inquiry, govern themselves democratically, and constantly seek out ways of making school more meaningful and learning-filled for everyone involved, especially for students.

I must say before venturing on that this school, the students, the teachers, the staff, and the community engaged me personally and intellectually throughout the study. The school and their lives were always open to me. I found North to be welcoming, real, vibrant, and dynamic. I believe the school and the community transformed themselves into learning communities that better serve the lives and the interests of its citizens, its families, and its friends. North Elementary School embodies deep, personal, and institutional commitments to children's lives, to learning, to democracy, and to continually transforming itself to better serve students and the community in its everyday practices. It has achieved foundational changes in the ways it thinks, believes, and acts that change projects and reform initiatives often promise but don't deliver. North Elementary School delivered and continues to deliver every day, transforming life and learning in the community.

It would surprise me if readers found this chapter to be filled with surprises. I hope that before you complete this last leg of the journey, that you might take a few moments to anticipate what I might say about school change — the transformation of learning communities — as a result of your new knowledge of this case. In a sense, my closing thoughts should clarify what the case has already borne out. You have made

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your own impressions to this point as a result of your interaction with this text. While the moderator of a travelogue might summarize at the end, partially enlightening what the audience has witnessed through visual and auditory images, the learning that lasts takes place during the program. I hope you will add your reflections and insights to mine at the end of this case. I provided space for you to do so. I invite you to write some summary thoughts before you read on here and again once you finish.

In the following pages, I discuss what I think are the 10 most important things that we can learn from this case regarding school change and the transformation of learning communities. Each item represents a mile marker, an attempt to mark an important point on our way home. Many more things could be listed and discussed here. Perhaps future efforts at such will illuminate this story even further.

Mile Marker 10: Professional Development Supports Change and Is Embedded in Change

Staff engaged in a complex and complete school reform movement need professional development. What they don't need is inservice, hit-or-miss chances to learn something new about teaching and learning. In this case, the staff and community needed and received ongoing, focused information and practice regarding the AS model and how it might work in their school.

On the one hand, programming that provided information and understanding about the AS model came early and continued for staff and the community throughout the life of the grant. Ultimately, however, the professional development that best supported change became embedded in the movement itself, in the processes that make it work. The community developed professionally because it adopted, implemented, and continually reshaped the reform in its own image. It grew and transformed itself while practicing the deepest forms of professional engagement, learning and re-learning what it values and believes, and what it means to put those values and beliefs in action on a daily basis.

Mile Marker 9: Inquiry Is the Linchpin Holding a Democratic Community Together

It is very difficult to have a democratic community without practicing democratic processes. If the school community values multiple voices and perspectives, participation, and shared decision making, then it must have some way of engaging members of the community in discourses that challenge traditional practices, search for underlying reasons for perceived problems, and find the best possible solutions that will enhance the school community and learning. The inquiry process provides the means through which the community can govern itself in a democratic manner while at the same time engag-

ing itself in perpetual learning. The very essence of what we do when we engage in inquiry involves the intellect, studying the problem together, conducting research, and proposing and implementing solutions.

North takes inquiry very seriously and has struggled with how best to go about it. It has found that inquiry requires that we take more time trying to figure out what the real problems are before jumping to inaccurate conclusions and unproductive solutions. At the same time, it has found that inquiry thrives at the center of its new identity, guaranteeing through its use that the community will remain attentive to two very important commitments: (1) that democratic governance of the school requires informed, considered, and shared judgments; and (2) that the classroom and students' lives thrive when engaged with the production of knowledge, not merely the passive reception of it. The primary means to this end is through the engagement of inquiry-oriented activities for learning.

Mile Marker 8: Symbolic Acts Count

Symbolic acts supporting the transformation of the learning community are more than symbolic, of course. Each has a practical purpose as well, but symbolic acts must affect and support the changes that occurred in this school through their symbolism, which lives long past the actual experiences. That's what symbols do: They stay with us and are continually interpreted and reinterpreted as the community matures.

The Vision Celebration that occurred at the end of the first year of funding — marking symbolically the transformation of the school by means of the parade march from town to the school by the citizens and then by the ceremonious cutting of the ribbon wrapping the new school — proved to hold lasting meaning for the participants in this school culture. The Vision Celebration symbolized the depth, seriousness, and joy the school experienced in plotting and then embarking on its journey toward becoming accelerated. Folks remember the occasion fondly and speak of repeating it. They remember it and center their commitment on it when they need to, remembering the images, the feelings, and the ideas that the event embodied.

The school also engages in symbolic acts that show its interest in remaining connected with the community by maintaining continual communication through publications. Ongoing communication not only keeps people up to date and informed, but serves the purpose of reminding people every day about what's at stake, what's important. Every document that comes out of the school has the vision statement at the top. The three core principles of the AS movement are posted in the building and are always referred to. Language and action support the changes and the change processes in the school by continually reinforcing the core beliefs and directions of the school, and by acting as powerful, ever-present symbols. Paying attention to the core, fundamental commitment of using symbols to support the movement constitutes a crucial aspect of any change endeavor, especially this one.

Mile Marker 7: Laying the Foundation for Change Is Crucial

When the school staff participated in the early team-building events at the beginning of the adoption stages, it made a profoundly crucial commitment to making the process understandable, beyond a matter of getting enough information. It made the transformation of the school a matter that affected everyone and everything, which involved laying a relational, personal, and community-oriented foundation for proceeding ahead. I don't know entirely what went on at the team-building event conducted at the first summer retreat in 1993, but staff members still speak of it as helping to break down personal barriers that staff members had with other members or with certain ideas. This staff readied itself to take on the tough, all-encompassing work of school reform by first getting straight what its commitments were to each other and to the school community. While problems no doubt have occurred among staff members, this initial effort solidified commitments that couldn't be broken by disagreements along the way.

In a similar sense, the early meetings at the school that involved the entire community laid a strong foundation for the change process and the changes that actually took place over the life of the grant. People who participated in the event came away excited and involved in the movement, and they remained so. Fears were squelched and contributions welcomed. This event and others like it set the tone for including the community — from town volunteers to parents — in the generation of ideas and the decision-making processes of the school. Faculty showed and continue to show that there is no area that is strictly their area of expertise — not curriculum, teaching, or governance. Everyone is welcome to offer up ideas and participate. This constitutes a strong, durable, and productive foundation from which to work. As a result, so many more resources (mainly people's ideas and services) are available for enhancing the life of the school and the learning that goes on in classrooms.

Mile Marker 6: Change Requires Leadership

Many different people and entities provided crucial leadership for setting out what the community believed, what it would do, and how it would get done. Community participation, on a wide scale, is itself a valuable form of leadership. Shared decision making requires leadership by everyone and can be manifest in a multitude of activities such as attending meetings, working with students in the school, facilitating meetings, generating and sharing new ideas, and clarifying and researching problems and potential solutions. All of these activities require individuals to make a commitment to acting and then to sharing their work with others. This builds community, strengthens the endeavor, and constitutes leadership.

Leadership also manifests itself in the work of individuals. Teachers, especially, took leadership roles in translating the ideas of the AS movement into schoolwide and classroom-specific realities. The AS coaches helped the staff and community understand how processes and decisions related to the over-

all ideas of the AS movement. Kerry and Jim kept the movement at the forefront, guiding, shepherding, and coaching the community's involvement with the change process. At root, leadership found its strongest form in individual and communal actions that supported the following democratic activities: soliciting the ideas and actions of others, listening, coaching the thorough and considered research of problems and potential solutions, and supporting solutions that others wanted to attempt.

Mile Marker 5: Change Is Difficult

People and the institutions created by people change all of the time. As I stated earlier, we can't help changing. Change is what happens to beings and things in our world, and these changes are largely out of our control. And, in so far as we think, we can control change. We build up a certain affinity for liking things the way they are — familiar, easy, comfortable. So change is difficult, especially when change requires that we give up the above qualities as they are associated with things or processes that we generally like or don't think are so bad.

Change is also difficult for those who see change as inevitable, completely out of their control, fated. They either resign themselves to going along with the crowd in order to please and not cause conflict, or to holding fast to a certain "It doesn't matter what I do so I'll do what I want to do no matter what anyone else thinks" mentality that causes wave after wave of needless tension and conflict. So change is difficult for people. And change is difficult, as a result, for the institutions they create.

In this particular scene, people fell into these categories of behavior, as well as many others. They could have seen themselves as helpless actors on the stage of school life, where fundamental, systematic change is so very hard to create for a host of reasons, including the barriers that personal experience, culture, and politics throw in front of us. Instead, they made a fundamental set of commitments to changing that helped them transcend the various and complicated factors that make change difficult on a personal and institutional level. At root, the school community decided that it needed to change in fundamental ways in order to serve the educational needs of students better. The community agreed to take on the changes that the AS model brought in its processes of creating shared beliefs and ways of acting in order to transform the school community to serve students better. This fundamental agreement to change by individuals marks the crucial commitment that made it possible to transform not only the lives of individuals, but also the life of the institutions at stake, the school and community.

Mile Marker 4: Change Takes Time and Is Evolutionary

A whole set of changes were put in motion and occurred over time, beginning from the very moment that folks began to talk about writing the Venture Capital grant proposal in the fall of 1992. But if anyone thought that substantive, productive changes would take place quickly, they were mistaken. This is not to say that changes didn't happen from the beginning. They did. But as this case bears out, change is more evolutionary than anything else. It takes time for people to consider deeply what it is that is important. And over time, the participants in this case found how deep, complicated, and difficult complete transformation is for the individual and for the school community.

But from the very beginning, the school has committed itself to the painstaking process of examining itself. The school believes this is a crucial commitment and that it reflects its commitment to complete, systematic, cultural change (the kind that Levin would have AS schools attempt to implement), rather than the piecemeal changes that often come through the adoption of educational innovations that are not shared by the entire community.

The staff finds it difficult, as all of us do, to take the change process slowly enough to insure that the solutions we attempt to put in place have a good chance for success. The school proved over and again how difficult it is to participate in change and not just let it happen to them. By engaging in inquiry, the school attempts to participate in the change process, working to make each thing it does fit the central vision as well as the purposes the model propagates. The examples here show how difficult, yet empowering, it can be to begin to foster the power and expertise the community can have over factors within its control, and how much better the life of the school can be when it is knowledgeable about what's going on and participates actively in making things happen over time.

But the fact remains that the process of change is continual, formative, not once-and-for-all. This may be impossible at any stage but is certainly true here. To me, this suggests that a focused, purposeful, and continual attention to changing the school will stay in place over time, well beyond the funding the Venture Capital grant provided. This is comforting, for those who think they have changed and are finished with it frighten me even more than those who say they won't move at all. There is always important work to do; success doesn't stand still.

Mile Marker 3: How Much Change Is Enough Change?

The problem with viewing the change process as evolutionary, as I do, is that it then becomes difficult to judge where to place the focus for thought and action in any particular scene. I spent considerable space here focusing on the fascinating phenomenon of the inquiry process and its use in school gov-

ernance and in the classroom. And I believe that the school has made remarkable changes in its work with inquiry. Not only has it changed the way it goes about making decisions about the school as a whole by using the inquiry process, it has changed classroom life through the curriculum and through pedagogy.

But when can and will the school be satisfied with the changes that have taken place in each area of inquiry, for instance? Has a transformation occurred that is a complete and total shift, a change of heart, a commitment to inquiry in the school and the classroom? Is this ever possible anyway? What would it look like if it were possible? How and when might the school be satisfied that it has done all it can do to put inquiry in place in the school and in classrooms? How complete must the transformation be in this area before the school community concentrates on other issues, problems, and processes? Is it concentrating on it enough now? Answers to these questions will come on another journey. For now, the question of how much change is enough lingers, as well as challenges.

Mile Marker 2: Change Must Be Complete, Deep

Related to the discussions of change as difficult, time-consuming, and evolutionary and of how much change is enough change is another perspective that balances them: change must be complete. What *complete* means is that while there will be variations in the manner in which any group attempts to reach its destination, systematic change occurs when the movement is accompanied by a collective change of heart among all the players in the scene. The AS model helped the school community define what it thinks, and suggested that it make a commitment to the values of the movement and to its own values. This first step is necessary for insuring that the change effort is not piecemeal, the kind that fades away with new personalities and new agendas. Instead, the change process is grounded in the values and commitments of the people on the scene. They make vows to work together, to support each other, to see it through. All of this is done in the name of making school a better place for students, and for learning. This is the bottom line, one that is constantly referred to in schools where change is complete.

Mile Marker 1: Everything Is for Children

Take a trip to Fletcher and to North Elementary School at any time during any year. Talk to people and look around. What you will hear and see at the school, in every conversation, every action, every intention, is an overt discourse in word and deed that puts children at the center. The school community knows that the school is important to everyone, young and old alike, schooled and unschooled alike; in this sense the school is truly a community endeavor, a community's institution. But at no time will the general community's welfare, concern, or agenda outweigh the unique concern that this school community has for each individual child.

This commitment — which is moral, ethical, and just — makes and remakes the school, every day, into a transformed and transforming learning community. Not that the commitment didn't exist before; but now the commitment is systemic, protected, and nurtured with the aid of the AS model's structure and the school community's translation of it into action on a daily basis. No student falls through the cracks; every effort is made to engage every student in the regular classroom with the regular curriculum; the staff, community, and students constantly think about how to make learning more powerful, engaging, meaningful. For all that we do, complete, positive, and transformational change in schools requires a fundamental commitment to children and their welfare.

Home

My son is a fifth grader now, and at the end of his fourth-grade year — his last at North — I said, "Are you going to be glad to be leaving?" He said, "Mom, I don't want to leave." Once he got to fifth grade he's like, "Well, yeah, it's OK," but he told me the other day that he hated school . . . I think he probably misses all of the hands-on learning here. I mean, if I had my choice, my child would never have left here." – A North parent volunteer

North is an Accelerated School, because you actually get to do activities instead of just learn about them. And you get freedom of speech. Like you can speak your mind. – A fifth grader at the Intermediate School, and a graduate of North Elementary School

EPILOGUE

It seems apropos to close this journey with an epilogue. I suppose the reader could be skeptical, wondering if the author ever really intends to end. References, appendices, etc., do follow. I admit it. I could keep adding things to keep from finishing, because the story at North goes on after the publication of this piece, even after your reading of it. So symbolically, the story at North continues and it shifts. Things do change.

As of this closing, there have been some recent personnel changes at the school. Principal Jim Gay accepted a superintendency at another area school district. The district hired Gary Pfister as the new principal. But regardless of these changes in school leadership, the school continues on its accelerated path, in large part because of efforts over the years to institutionalize the program. In the following paragraphs, I briefly note what has been institutionalized and infer that these are important steps to creating lasting, comprehensive change in a school program.

The faculty and staff have been very responsive in pursuing Accelerated Schools Coaching Training. Half of the faculty members and staff are now trained as coaches; this shifts the burdens for conceptualizing, leading, and practicing the AS model from one person — Kerry in the beginning years — to the whole faculty and staff.

The faculty and staff have made excellent use of the grant and the district's continued financial support by pursuing professional-development opportunities that continue to renew them. They have an annual retreat. They attend conferences together and plan to attend together the next national meeting of the Accelerated Schools Network. They agree to share together professional-development activities such as speakers and workshops so that they are not learning in isolation.

In the school program, two particular and crucial things are set and operating well. First, the cadre groups continue to meet and have become a set of formal structures for governance and action in the school. The fact that the school has *re-cycled* through the taking-stock process and reconstituted cadres twice shows its comfort with the process and the value it places on it as an essential part of its culture and change structure. And while the cadres have been institutionalized, they allow new ideas to emerge and alternative forms of action to take place. Second, the family groups continue to meet, reinforcing in the curriculum the mission of the school, the AS movement, and how it plays out in the lives of all involved in the school, especially students.

And last, but certainly not least, inquiry as a way of life continues to shape the life of the school. The school community has taken part in the transformation of the culture of inquiry in the school; members of the community view the pursuit of ideas, best practice, and the overall improvement of people's lives, especially children's, as a complex moral commitment to which they have devoted themselves.

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APPENDIX A

PROJECT PROPOSAL

Miami East North Elementary School

Proposal Ohio Venture Capital Case Study, 1997-98

This proposal lays out an outline for the study that includes areas of focus. We then expand on each general area of focus (briefly, with questions and statements) and suggest ways of collecting data that will inform our writing about each focus area. Following the proposal is a timeline for data collection during first semester.

Outline for Case Study

I. Describing the Scene

A. What is our community like?

We intend to use different perspectives to tell the story of the community, school — setting the framework, providing a picture of our rural setting and school for the reader. We will employ student, teacher, parent, and administrators' perspectives on the scene, in general, to describe the community, and the school in the context of the community. We will also use data regarding educational measures and demographics in telling our story.

B. What is the nature of our relationship to the Accelerated Schools (AS hereafter) Network and Process?

1. How did we get involved with AS? How and why did we choose it as the reform structure towards which we would invest venture capital, time, and our collective hearts and minds? How was it selected from among a group of options?

2. What is the story of our involvement with this movement in terms of its implementation? What are the fundamental assumptions of the movement, and how do they appeal or fit with the current school culture (i.e., fundamentals such as all kids can learn, every child is gifted, use of powerful learning strategies, and use of inquiry in classrooms and in teacher/parent cadres)? And how does the movement seem to be taking shape, and working? How does it fit (or not) with the educational and political landscapes of the school district?

II. Examining AS

What does AS look and feel like in our school? How have things changed as a result of our association with the ideas of AS and our implementation of the process?

1. Examining a more collaborative environment for teachers, students, and parents, show how
   - AS structure gives opportunities for staff development.
   - teachers are working together in classrooms with students more and better.
2. Establishing a place where kids can succeed and be challenged by the best teachers and curriculum, show/tell
   - changes in student achievement using data such as test scores and student work.
   - stories of student and teacher successes, some against the odds and some that result from the type of environment that we and AS have created. No one falls through the cracks.

III. Looking More Closely at Inquiry

How do we do inquiry, the center piece of the movement, as a group of inquirers in cadres and in the classroom, and how does inquiry contribute to the continuing advancement of the AS process, to our students' achievement, and to our professional development? (This is where university connection might make developmental contribution, for instance, in encouraging/guiding reflective teacher focus groups on the inquiry process and peer visitations to examine teaching practices.)

Questions:

1. *What is inquiry?*
2. *What does sound implementation of the inquiry process look like in our classrooms?*
3. *How has the inquiry process (or AS strategies such as "powerful learning") changed our teaching and/or student learning?*
4. *How does the inquiry process work in cadres, and how has it made a difference in the ways we view and approach teaching and learning in our everyday practice?*
5. *How has the inquiry process work in cadres changed the way the school is governed, how the principal acts as leader, and how the faculty/staff take on leadership responsibilities for governance, curriculum, and teaching?*

Data Collection Approaches

In general, we will try to collect artifacts/documents; conduct interviews; build a database of reflective, focused writings (stories) about the scene, and observe classroom practice.

1. *Collect reflective writings on the process of conducting this inquiry and examining focus areas.*

   The team will keep journals on-line, building a database throughout semester (each team member will write at least one entry per week).

2. *Examine curriculum documents for evidence of change, reform, and success with the AS movement.*

   Collect and examine (for example): fourth-grade curriculum guide; other grade-level plans for units or for year; copies of lesson plans (Jim) and teachers' lesson-plan books; etc.

3. *Interview teachers and administrators (local and state) regarding their understanding of the AS processes and their connections to actual classroom practices in the school.*

   How has the AS framework changed the school? How has it changed teacher work and teaching? What different procedures have classroom teachers employed to look differently at curriculum and reflect on their work? (Use of collaborative inquiry, communication, reflecting, sharing ideas, checking for coherence between curriculum and state expectations — are we working toward same ends? Use of cadres as the main force in this regard.) How is the movement having an impact on the community and the professional development of the district? (More specific questions to follow and decisions about whom to interview.)

4. *Collect focused, reflective writings that document important assumptions about the school, AS processes, cadre work, curriculum, teaching, and learning.*

   For instance, gather Jim's reflective writings about Skill Development in the Curriculum. Teachers and administrators respond to questions in writing, such as, "How has AS changed your work and focus in the classroom?" (Requests for focused writings will emerge as questions and study take shape. May use on-line to share comments and build database.)

5. *Study/observe classroom scenes where curriculum and learning reforms are taking place.*

   Team members visit classrooms and take notes on the scene (non-evaluative and for telling the story). University representative works toward becoming participant-observer and trusted colleague.

Visitations/Data Collection Events for Miami East North TLC Project

Tom's Visits to School, Fall 1997 *(to be continued and scheduled for spring 1998)*

W 9/10	arrive 8:30, staff meets; A.M. — Rhea, Misty visits (first grade); P.M. — team meeting; 2:00 — Jim tour; 3:30 — staff meeting
W 9/17	A.M. — Carla, Linda visits (second grade) P.M.— David, Nancy visits (third grade)
F 9/26	A.M. — Amy, Chuck, Jennifer visits (fourth grade) P.M. — Barb (K), Kerry (Reading) visits
F 10/10	Old-Fashioned Day; interview Kerry

F 10/17	interviews A.M. — Jim, Linda student focus group P.M. Team Meeting to share data collected, due: demographic data (folder), teacher reflections on peer visits, ongoing check of reflections collected on-line
F 10/24	A.M. — class visits (selected); P.M. — administrator interviews in district
M 11/3	2:00 P.M. — parent focus group; 3:30 P.M. — cadre meeting; evening — cadre meeting with parents
W 11/12	A.M. — teacher interviews (teachers from 10/24 visits); P.M. — team meeting, data collection check
W 11/19	A.M. — family day, power kids; free for team meeting to prep for Dec. 5 TLC meeting; team members share reflections on cadre work in team meeting
F 12/5	Columbus TLC meeting
W 12/12(?)	Tom and Chris come to Fletcher for Faculty Holiday Festival

Events for Team

9/8 – 10/17	team conducts data collection of demographic data
9/29 – 10/3	peer visits and graduate interviews Kerry and Linda interview three students from past team plans times and gets substitute teacher for peer visits this week teachers send reflections on-line to Tom by 10/3

Team Meeting Dates and Agendas

W 9/10	1-2 pm — checking plans, are we on track?
F 10/17	2-3:30 (approximately) — data collection check
W 11/12	1-3:30 (approximately) — data collection and team progress check
W 11/19	1-3:30 (approximately) — prep for OISE meeting

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for Fifth and Seventh Graders Who Previously Attended Miami East North

1. *Grand Tour: What did you like (or dislike) about school at Miami East North?*
2. *In your opinion, what makes North an accelerated school?*
3. *What are the differences between North and other school programs you've experienced?*
4. *How were you made to feel as though you were an important member of the school community at North?*
5. *How did North help you to discover your academic and social strengths?*
6. *How have your school experiences at North helped you in your other school experiences?*
7. *What is your best memory of experiences in the accelerated school?*

Questions for School Administrators and Faculty at North

1. *What is your story regarding the selection of the model and its implementation?*
   - *(a) How was the model selected?*
   - *(b) What were the key events in the implementation process?*
   - *(c) What were the school program and atmospheres (culture of the school) like before implementation?*
2. *What is your working definition of an accelerated school program?*
3. *How does the Miami East North program fit this model?*
4. *What is your working definition of inquiry? How does it make its way into classroom teaching?*
5. *How does inquiry in cadres affect school culture, teaching and learning, professional development?*
6. *How do you perceive the structural supports for implementing the program? Have they been adequate? What have they consisted of (training sessions, materials, etc.)?*
7. *What have been the barriers for implementing the program?*

8. *How have things changed? What is different now? What do you attribute those differences to? Are changes attributable specifically to the model, or would they have occurred anyway? Name and describe, if applicable.*

9. *What has the implementation of the Accelerated Schools model meant to you?*

10. *Describe a success story under the new model. (Tell about a student, or unit taught, or collegial relationships growing among faculty, etc.)*

Questions for District Administrators

1. *Grand Tour: What is your role in relation to the Accelerated Schools program at Miami East North?*

2. *How did the program come to exist? How did you support it (or not)?*

3. *What is your understanding of the program and its basic ideas — its focuses on (1) developing powerful learning strategies and inquiry-oriented teaching and learning in a unified environment, and (2) developing teacher/community cadres for problem solving?*

4. *How has the model had an impact on thinking and decision making about school programs at the district level (if any)?*

5. *What are some of the joys and difficulties related to administering and negotiating the reforms at Miami East North?*

Focus Group Questions for Fourth Graders

1. *What do you like about going to school at North? What do you dislike?*

2. *How has the school program helped you to recognize and develop your strengths?*

3. *What are the most interesting things you have learned or experienced in school? How did you learn or experience them? What were the lessons or activities like? Describe one or two.*

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Miami East North Elementary School Community Member:

We are researchers from Miami University involved in the Transforming Learning Communities project. Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) is a state-wide research project that looks at schools that have made good progress in school reform; TLC investigators are trying to find out what the patterns are in successful public school reform. Each school involved (Miami East North Elementary is one of twelve) will be the object of a case study report, researched and written by a team of teachers and university faculty. This project is being conducted at Miami East North by the following case study team:

Dr. Jim Gay, principal
Ms. Kerry Elifritz, teacher
Ms. Linda Hofacker, school secretary
Dr. Tom Poetter, Miami University
Dr. Stephen Anderson, University of Toronto, TLC co-director

We would like to request your participation in this study. If you agree to participate, we promise to do the following:

1. All responses will be confidential. No teacher or staff member or any other person will be told who has participated in an interview, or the content of the interviews. Interviews will be conducted in private, and no one else will be able to hear what is said. Interviews will be held at times and a place that is mutually convenient to you and the researcher. Any reference to data concerning you will be anonymous or will use a false name that you can choose.

2. Questions asked will deal with your experience with or impressions of Miami East North Elementary School.

3. You will be allowed to withdraw from an interview at any time with no consequences.

If you want further details about the project, there is information on file in the Miami East North main office, or you may call Dr. Tom Poetter at Miami University, (513) 529-6825. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in research, you may call the Office of Advancement of Scholarship and Teaching at Miami University, (513) 529-3734.

Signing on the appropriate line below means that you understand the study and your role as participant and that you give your informed consent to participate in the study. If you are a student under the age of 18, you need to have your parent or legal guardian sign also.

I, the undersigned, hereby indicate willingness to participate in the Transforming Learning Communities project study of Miami East North Elementary School.

Student Signature _____ (Date) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ (Date) _____

Teacher Signature _____ (Date) _____

Staff Signature _____ (Date) _____

TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES SITES

MIAMI EAST NORTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Miami East Local Schools (Miami County)
Miami University

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

1 **Brentmoor Elementary School**
Mentor Exempted Village Schools
Cleveland State University

2 **Cranwood Learning Academy**
Cleveland City Schools
Cleveland State University

3 **Dawson-Bryant Elementary School**
Dawson-Bryant Local Schools
(Lawrence County)
Ohio University

4 **Lomond Elementary School**
Shaker Heights City Schools
Cleveland State University

5 **Miami East North Elementary School**
Miami East Local Schools
(Miami County)
Miami University

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

6 **East Muskingum Middle School**
East Muskingum Local Schools
(Muskingum County)
Muskingum College
Ohio University

7 **Galion Middle School**
Galion City Schools
The Ohio State University

8 **Talawanda Middle School**
Talawanda City Schools
Miami University

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

9 **Federal Hocking High School**
Federal Hocking Local Schools
(Athens County)
Ohio University

10 **Franklin Heights High School**
South-Western City Schools
The Ohio State University

11 **Reynoldsburg High School**
Reynoldsburg City Schools
The Ohio State University

12 **Robert A. Taft High School**
Cincinnati City Schools
Miami University

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